DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 139 071 EA 009 471

AUTHOR	Broad, Lyn
TITLE	Alternative Schools: Why, What, Where & How Much. Education U.S.A. Special Report.
INSTITUTION	National School Public Relations Association, Arlington, Va.
PUB DATE	77
NOTE	98p.
AVAILABLE FROM	National School Public Relations Association, 1801 North Moore Street, Arlington, Virginia 22209 (Stock No. 411-13333, $7.95; orders under $8.00 must be accompanied by payment; orders over $8.00 must be accompanied by payment unless submitted on an authorized purchase order)
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.83 Plus Postage. HC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	*Alternative Schools; Basic Skills; Cultural Pluralism; Dropout Prevention; *Educational Alternatives; Educational Facilities; *Educational Innovation; Elementary Secondary Education; Multiunit Schools; Open Education; Performance Based Education; *Program Descriptions; School Integration; *School Organization; Student Alienation; Student Needs; Teacher Developed Materials

ABSTRACT

Both time and circumstance have convinced many a school district that it must find a better way to educate its students. For many districts the way has been alternative schools and programs that offer students a choice of goals, structures, and approaches to curriculum. One report estimated that as many as 5,000 alternative schools would be in operation by September of 1975. The National School Boards Association in surveying a sample of its members in 1975 found about 25 percent offered options in their districts; 66 percent in districts with more than 25,000 students offered options. The report concluded that the alternative school concept is definitely not on the fringe of American public school activity. A number of programs that are representative of how alternatives respond to some of the central issues in American education are described. How students are benefiting from the strengths of alternative schools and what educators are doing to circumvent the hazards are the core of this report. (Author/MLF)

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EDUCATION U.S.A.
Special Report

ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS: Why, What, Where & How Much

ED139071

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1801 N. Moore Street
Arlington, Virginia 22209

Library of Congress Catalog Card No. 77-76557

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Acknowledgement

Alternative Schools is one of a series of Education U.S.A. Special Reports on current trends in school policies and programs. The purpose of the series is to provide school practitioners at all levels, and others concerned with education, with the most up-to-date information on issues at the core of today's constantly changing education scene.

Alternative Schools was written by Lyn Broad. It was developed and produced by the Education U.S.A. Special Reports staff: Anne C. Lewis, Executive Editor; Cynthia C. Menand, Director of Editorial Services, and John H. Wherry, Editorial Director. Special research, editorial and production services were provided by Nancy Colalillo, Janet Eaffy, Debbie Lucckese and Virginia McAllister.

The National School Public Relations Association expresses its gratitude to the school districts, state departments of education, professional education associations and alternative education interest groups which responded to requests for information and offered valuable assistance to the researchers, writers and editors of this report.

Why This Report?

Since the alternative school movement began in the early 1970s, the nature and outlook of American education have dramatically altered. A growth industry has gone into decline: districts are closing schools with empty classrooms; many teachers are out of work and mobility of employed personnel has been reduced to a standstill; the inflation which plagues citizens is translated into rejected school bond referendums and cutbacks in instructional programs to meet higher operational costs. At the same time, public satisfaction seems at low ebb. Schools are vandalized; the student "foot vote" is tallied in high truancy and dropout rates; and parents complain that their children cannot write or spell as well as they themselves were taught to do. And from time to time we are reminded by one report or another that the millions of dollars spent on educational research and innovation during the last decade have not had much lasting impact – that, in fact, few successful new methods or ideas have found widespread acceptance in classrooms across the nation.

All this comes when schools are under increasing pressure from courts and legislation to more conscientiously safeguard individual student's rights, to better educate children with special needs, and to eliminate the inequities of sex and race discrimination. Both time and circumstance have convinced many a school district that it must find a better way to educate its students.

For many districts the way has been alternative schools and programs that offer students a choice of goals, structures and approaches to curriculum. And from small but successful beginnings, a number of these have extended the range and number of their options with widespread community approval. In so doing, they are putting into practice the recommendations of several national studies and conferences which have stressed the need for

the development of options in public education to meet the changing needs of a changing society. Notable among these was the bicentennial conference on secondary education cosponsored by the U.S. Office of Education (USOE) and the National Assn. of Secondary School Principals (NASSP). The four interrelated themes of the conference, reviewed by *New Dimensions for Educating Youth*, read like the statement of goals for many alternative schools. They are:

1. "Dejuvenilize" secondary education. Find ways to involve students in curriculum planning or school governance; ways for them to deal with people of all ages, thereby reducing the isolation of the youth subculture; and ways to make school more relevant to students' present lives rather than a preparatory step to some uncertain future.

2. Increase community involvement in the school and student involvement in community service.

3. Change the school environment by making it smaller, emphasizing education rather than attendance, and by providing greater flexibility about entering and leaving after the compulsory attendance age. "The mood and atmosphere should reflect an awareness of our multicultural, multiethnic and interdependent world."

4. Shift the curriculum focus to include not only basic skills, but also an awareness of values by which students can set standards and make decisions for themselves. Guidance should be every teacher's responsibility.

While these recommendations were intended for secondary schools in general, it is noteworthy that most secondary alternatives, and many elementary ones, have already moved in these directions. Besides NASSP, numerous other groups which have recommended alternative schools include the 1970 White House Conference on Children and Youth, California's Commission for Reform of Intermediate and Secondary Education (RISE), the National Commission on the Reform of Secondary Education, the North Central Assn. of Schools and Colleges, and Phi Delta Kappa.

Education U.S.A. has written about many pioneering districts which created options for students. But whatever has gone before, districts which are now beginning alternatives are still carving new

Commitment More Than Dollars

"Of the alternative schools today, half were started without any additional funding. You need the commitment more than you need the dollars. If you want to use not having dollars as an excuse, you probably don't want to do it anyway."

Betty Jo Zander, principal, Pratt Continuous Progress School, Minneapolis, Minn.

paths through local territory. Even so, the alternatives movement is now more analogous to the way west by rail than by covered wagon. Aided by both the expertise and the errors of those who have covered some of the ground already, the second generation of those planning alternatives has accelerated its pace and knows a little better what may lie ahead.

Some reports show impressive growth in a short time. In 1973, when the International Consortium on Options in Public Education (ICOPE) first reported the growth of alternatives, it identified 464 alternative public schools in 35 states. In 1975, ICOPE estimated "the number of alternative schools in operation by this September may well be as high as 5,000," and proclaimed: "When compared to other major movements in public education, there has never been anything like it. What is even more significant is the fact that this vast experimentation is occurring during one of the most difficult periods public education has ever faced."

In November 1975 the National School Boards Assn., surveying a sampling of its members, found about 25% offered options in their districts: 6% offered elementary alternatives; 13%, secondary; and 6%, alternatives at both elementary and secondary levels. And although alternatives are found in every size district, they are more likely to be found in the larger ones. Of responding districts with fewer than 600 students, 18% offer alternatives; 39% of districts with 5,000 to 9,999 students do; and alternatives were available in 66% of districts with more than 25,000 students. The report concludes: "The alternative school concept is definitely not on the fringe of American public school activity; it is an important part of the program in many school districts and its significance is growing."

Mario Fantini, dean of education at the U. of Massachusetts and an indefatigable advocate of options in education over the past

several years, is encouraged by recent trends. It is important, he believes, that offering options is perceived today as a more conservative idea than it was five years ago: "In our society, if you're genuinely interested in public school reform, you must deal with the mainstream." Five years ago, he says, alternative education was an idea in danger of becoming a fad. "Today it is the closest thing to a movement in American education," Fantini says.

Education U.S.A. agrees with ICOPE that "any development affecting public education in more than two-thirds of the large school districts in the country deserves careful scrutiny." Accordingly, we have surveyed our readers, talked to leaders in alternative schools around the country, and investigated and described a number of programs which are representative of how alternatives respond to some of the central issues in American education. We have not included some very well known programs about which a great deal has already been written – such omissions are necessary in the face of the enormous proliferation of schools and programs in the past few years. Nor have we dealt with such philosophical issues as alternative goals for education or what education writer Ivan Illich termed "deschooling" society. These are issues more often debated by those who feel that educational reform is viable only outside the system. Our report is about public school alternatives.

In our study of these public alternatives, we have found both encouraging and disturbing trends. On the bright side:

- Public perception of alternatives – an important factor in their acceptance – can be improved by good communication.
- Education agencies at all levels are modifying regulations to facilitate development of alternative schools and programs.
- Evaluation procedures of most alternatives show they compare favorably with conventional schools on measures of cognitive growth – and usually surpass them in the affective area.
- Alternatives have successfully served in some communities as voluntary integration models, and networks of magnet schools have been accepted in response to court-ordered integration mandates.

But unfortunately:

- The meaning of "alternative" is often obscured by its application to mandatory programs for problem students or to any slightly different program in an attempt to make it seem innovative. At worst, a stigma results which extends to other alternative programs; at least, the public becomes confused about what an alternative is.

- Without a broad base of community support, which is likely to be lacking where programs are not well understood, alternatives are often the first to fall when the budget is trimmed.

- Certain kinds of options may promote segregation through admissions criteria or groupings within the school.

How students are benefitting from the strengths of alternative schools and what educators are doing to circumvent the hazards are the core of this report.

Chapter 1.

Why Alternative Schools?

Even though districts have various motivations for beginning alternative schools and programs, a number of common reasons account for their proliferation. These reasons are both philosophical and practical. While America has long been ideologically committed to the goal of universal education, only in the past few decades has that goal come close to reality. As it began to seem attainable, we looked more critically at how it could be attained and discovered that the method that seemed best for most of our youth nevertheless did not really serve them all. A commitment to educate all students to their full potential – not just require their attendance – is what more and more parents, educators and members of the general public are demanding from schools. Implicit in this concept is the recognition that individual differences may not be met by a monolithic system as well as they can be by one offering a variety of approaches.

Responses to an *Education U.S.A.* survey about why alternative programs were established reveal this philosophical commitment, whether or not enrollment in the programs is primarily determined by student or parent choice. To the question, why was your program established, 69% of the respondents answered "to meet individual interests and needs." More specific variations of this idea (to meet the needs of particular groups of students, to motivate and interest students, to foster independence, to match teaching and learning styles, etc.) accounted for another 23%. The concept of meeting different needs in different ways extends logically to that of offering students and parents a choice about what alternatives would suit them best. A few years ago the term "alternative" connoted "free schools" and programs designed to channel the disaffected and disruptive students out of the mainstream. Gradually it has become synonymous with "option,"

which by implication suggests the basic marketing principle: give the consumer a choice.

Closely related to the commitment to educate all children is the emphasis in the last decade on individual merit and the awareness that educational strength lies not in teaching to a common denominator and ignoring those who are uncommon, but in valuing and fostering respect among those who are different. In practice, this philosophy has often worked better with individuals than with groups. But pluralism, nevertheless, is beginning to be acknowledged by an educational system whose institutional and conservative nature has not always recognized diversity as a virtue. That the recognition has been expedited by legislation and new policies banning race and sex discrimination by no means limits it to these areas. Mandates to educate the handicapped and learning disabled, bilingual/bicultural programs (not uncommon options within some districts) and special schools for gifted and talented students are likewise part of the trend.

In the September 1976 issue of *Phi Delta Kappan*, Theodore R. Sizer, chairman of the board of the Education Development Center in Newton, Mass., and former dean of the education faculty at Harvard U., points to the "special educational needs of special groups, increasingly ethnic as well as racial," and the likelihood that these will make their pressures felt as the trend toward community involvement in shaping school policy develops. "A sound route for public policy," Sizer argues, "is to recognize that youngsters may not only 'go to school,' but more effectively 'go to schools.' That is, a student might attend more than one school at a time – schools which not only reinforce ethnic concerns, but also expose the student to wider and broader ideas as well. . . As a matter of public policy, education should move toward institutional pluralism." Sizer maintains that we need a "smorgasbord of schools," accredited, open and "accessible to all who would choose among them."

Those who mistrust the provision of such diverse interests might consider the potential benefit stated by John E. Coons, professor of law at the U. of California at Berkeley, in the same issue of *Phi Delta Kappan*: "Variety in culture and ideology is vital to the civil dialogue and a hedge against totalitarianism. Family choice thus should be encouraged simply as a source of competing values. And such value pluralism is not to be confused with 'divisiveness'; dissenting families encouraged to make their own choices are more likely to trust and support the polity that has trusted them. They are a source not of division but of consensus and cohesion."

Perhaps the most pervasive philosophical rationale for providing options to traditional schooling is the changing nature of society itself. While many argue that the only constant in life has always been change, most would also agree that its nature and rate have dramatically altered in the last two decades. Consequently, so has the need to perceive education as a process, rather than a product. If estimates are accurate that a person may have three or four careers in a lifetime and that the knowledge with which one graduates from college will, in some fields, be obsolete within 10 or 15 years, survival demands that one become an active participant in lifelong learning, rather than merely a recipient of information. The growth of the open enrollment community college, leisure learning programs and community adult education courses testifies to the need felt by adults to seek education beyond the high school or baccalaureate level, which they once assumed would be adequate for their purposes in life. Only a system that helps students develop skills in directing their own learning and deriving information as well from nonschool sources will provide an antidote to obsolescence. Advocates of alternatives like action learning and community-based programs point to their strengths in developing a student's coping skills and confidence in decision-making as essentials in the kind of future we may reasonably anticipate.

Responding to the Need

Whatever the philosophical commitment, the *Education U.S.A.* survey shows that many alternatives have been established in direct response to the needs felt by parents, students and educators. Many respondents said their programs resulted from "consumer demand": they were instituted at the insistence of parents and students, usually with considerable input from both in the planning stages. (This demand was first evident in the late 1960s and early 1970s in the wave of alternatives, "free schools" and others, formed outside the public school system by disgruntled parents, teachers and students. While many of these were short-lived as independent schools, they were apparently useful in stimulating recognition of the need for change. That some groups were not well served by existing programs is implied in other answers as well: to meet the needs of noncollege prep, veterans, married and working students; to teach marketable skills; to forestall potential dropouts; and to motivate and interest students.

Who Benefits? Everyone

Students who would not perform as well, if at all, are given the opportunity to succeed because of these programs. Students who might behaviorally be a problem, causing trouble for themselves and taking attention away from their classmates in a traditional setting, are accommodated by these programs. Students who might drop out and be counted as failures against us are given another chance.

Teachers who have been stultified by the rigidities of the traditional program are "opened up" by these programs and encouraged to new levels of activity and invention. And the impact is not limited to only those teachers who enter the new programs. It ripples out to affect their colleagues who, while maintaining the features of the traditional programs with which they are comfortable, try some of the successful methods they observe being practiced by their progressive fellows in these programs.

Parents, too, are affected, and they are often parents of youngsters who display above-average potential but less than average performance: not your typical satisfied consumer. These parents observe the positive change in their child – whether the change be in achievement, behavior, attitude – and they themselves are changed from critics of the schools to boosters of them.

Finally the district's public image, its reputation, is positively affected by the presence among its offerings of these programs. New Rochelle is regarded to be, both by those who live and work here and by those who hear about the district from a distance, a district where potentially good programs can get a trial; where students are offered instructional program options; where teachers can work in an environment and use methods that are congruent with their different teaching styles.

On balance . . . the positive effects of these programs more than offset the costs and justify the district's effort to maintain them.

From "An Evaluation of Experimental Instructional Programs," Office of Instruction, City School District of New Rochelle, N.Y.

That schools and some students are "out of sync" has long been obvious to those who have agonized over high absentee and dropout rates. Considering that the survey respondents represented both elementary and high school levels in roughly a 40/60 split, a fairly large number (10%) cited "to forestall potential dropouts" as the motivating factor in setting up their alternative programs. And almost all expressed satisfaction with the results. Only three indicated the additional costs of their alternative programs were "probably not justified," or that it was difficult to justify the cost to the public. (Many entailed no additional cost or were even cheaper than traditional programs to operate.)

Apathy, a less dramatic symptom of alienation, was also recognized as injurious to learning. Respondents pointed to substantial improvements in attitude development, with many citing several justifications for whatever the programs cost. Besides the 26% who expressed general satisfaction, another 25% specifically cited "better student involvement or adjustment" and 17% reported reductions in the dropout rate. Other responses included public satisfaction (7%), increased skills development (17%), and a richer program, better level of education or improved use of community resources (3%).

Only 2% to 3% overtly stated that discipline was a major factor in the formation of their alternatives or that the program was justified on these grounds. Those who did pointed to improved student safety and less disruption and vandalism.

But by and large, the comments concerned the needs of students and the feeling that a variety of approaches was more successful in meeting them:

- "It often saves a child."
- "If one-half succeed, it is worth the expense."
- "Necessary as well as justified."
- "Teaching the whole child is essential."

And one administrator emphatically cited the alternative program as the "sole realistic means available to us to build skills and self-confidence in some students."

Students are not the only ones to benefit from a variety of choices. Some teachers, as well, chafe under the restraints of a traditionally structured classroom and cannot function to capacity

within it. Teachers – sometimes very creative teachers – drop out, too. One great appeal of alternative schools has been to free teachers to develop their own potential and with it more flexible ways of interacting with students and helping them learn. In so doing, a teacher's capability of adapting to the individual learning style of students is also increased. In the survey, a few schools mentioned such reasons for establishing alternative programs: to match teaching and learning styles; to capitalize on teacher strengths and interests; and to encourage professional growth.

Many alternative programs had evolved from teacher interest. And most cited personal request, teacher application, or the volunteering of teachers for the program as a basic criterion of faculty selection. A National Alternative Schools Program (NASP) at the U. of Massachusetts survey showed that public alternative schools are the result of "grass roots" efforts. Their 1974 survey of over 300 schools states:

> In over half the schools (53%) teachers provided "major impetus" for the program. In most instances, two groups were active initiators (therefore figures total over 100%), with students (32.8%), parents (34.2%) and community members (31.6%) playing major roles.

Robert L. Fizzell, coordinator of the Action Learning Center in Skokie, Ill., has studied schools and students to determine what influences the average student's progress in school. Fizzell developed profiles for 11 programs serving different social classes in both urban and suburban schools. He studied such things as personal characteristics (self-concept, social orientation, social class background); academic characteristics (academic self-concept, learning style, interests, time preferences); and external factors (family, peers, legal problems, health). In all, Fizzell identified some 50 variables that related to student success in different programs. Generally, he found students who do well in traditional schools have very average profiles, while those who don't have several characteristics outside the average range. He found also that students well served by an alternative program had similar profiles, which included traits that were not "average." One finding was clear: "Often characteristics associated with success in one school are associated with failure in another."

As might be expected, academic characteristics (in addition to ability and interest) and personal qualities are more important to success in school than external factors. Fizzell found, for example,

that time – either time of day or blocks of time – significantly affect performance. The student who works diligently on two subjects and ignores the others may be responding to a particular need to devote larger blocks of time to current interests. It may be difficult for some students to shift gears at the sound of the bell. More flexible scheduling would better serve these needs. Learning styles, Fizzell notes, fall into four categories – experiential, peer study, tutorial, or traditional. The successful students in a school generally show a preference for the learning style common to it. Students with a negative academic self-concept stand a better chance of success if they leave the academic environment in which it developed to go to another that is essentially noncompetitive and supportive.

Match Programs to Learning Styles

In establishing alternatives, Fizzell maintains, we must investigate the characteristics of all students – those whom the school serves successfully as well as those it does not. "One pitfall to avoid is to define educational needs by past problems: truancy, aggressions, pregnancy. These characteristics have little or nothing to do with educational need," he says. The best education for all is not provided by modifying existing successful programs, thereby endangering their value for a great many students. Nor does it follow there is one "best" model alternative. "It is clear that the schools I have studied can, together, serve a much greater proportion of our youth than can any one of them alone," Fizzell says. "We must provide additional learning environments for those who do not fit into the existing programs."

It is important how students and programs get together. Pointing to the dangers of uninformed choices in an article for *Phi Delta Kappan*, Rita and Kenneth Dunn wrote: "Striving to provide alternatives for students who learn in different ways is an excellent move toward obtaining increased academic achievement. But prescribing these innovations on a wholesale, random, voluntary or parent-determined basis is unconscionable."

The Dunns say the best program may depend on how students respond to the physical environment, their emotional makeup, the sociological setting and their physical well-being and needs. Environmental influences – e.g., levels of light and sound, heat, formal and informal study areas – affect them. Some students can accomplish assigned tasks independently while others have short

attention spans and need frequent interaction with an adult to sustain their academic interest. The former, rather than the latter, would profit by independent study or self-paced instruction. Some students learn better by interacting with peers, while others need interaction with authority figures. And the physical characteristics of a student are important: Do they learn best from hearing, from visualizing, from a tactile or kinesthetic involvement? A multisensory approach rather than a lecture situation will benefit these students. The Dunns emphasize that unless the programs can be matched with the learning styles of students don't expect any better record with innovations than with any other program. The most successful programs use screening techniques, including interviews with parents and students to make sure that the students understand the nature of the program and its appropriateness for them.

Not all would agree, however, that the placement of a student in the most supportive environment is the educational ideal. Allan Glatthorn, of the U. of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education and former director of an alternative school, believes it is time to question that assumption. Instead, he argues, optimal tension promotes growth, and alternative school people need to think more analytically about the different kinds of structures schools can provide to create freedom within the student, rather than freedom about myriad external details "which sap our psychic energy" for more important choices. Structure and freedom are not antithetical, he emphasizes. We need "open minds and open hearts, but not necessarily open schools."

Glatthorn points to research by David E. Hunt of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education that shows children at certain conceptual levels need different kinds of environments to move to the next conceptual level. And, he says, if the goal of education is to produce students who can function effectively in both the high and low structured situations that adult life imposes, students may need what they do not like or "feel" best with. Superficially this may sound a little like the "do-it-because-it's-good-for-you" argument so long used to justify some restrictive traditional schools. But Glatthorn argues that instead of one alternative for specific students, we need many alternatives for all students. Together these would offer a "cycle of experience" through which students may move as their needs require. Instead of an action learning program or walkabout experience being strictly a senior year option, for example, some students might profit from them earlier and require a more structured and heavily academic senior

year prior to college entrance. He believes that schools – places for the "benign intervention of caring adults" – should urge and persuade students to seek growth situations. For some this might mean "something to push against," rather than total satisfaction, which, he observed, often leads to apathy. To this end, educators could look at how all existing programs – from the traditional to the unstructured – might reorganize time, space and curriculum to offer a range of "structures that free" and make the student's choice a more valuable one.

This element of choice often is the most persuasive reason for establishing options, as expressed by a Cincinnati principal responding to the survey: "Students who have a choice in selecting their style of education and, to some extent, the content are happier and better performers." This rationale recognizes that those who participate voluntarily are likely to do so with a greater commitment to their choice than will those who are required to participate. By offering options, schools develop a vested interest among their body of supporters – students, faculty and parents – who are dedicated to making the option work. And this voluntary commitment affords greater opportunities for mutual respect and a cooperative attitude toward learning to develop.

What Kinds of Options Exist?

With the enormous number of alternatives as varied as the originality of their planners and the local needs they attempt to meet, it's a little difficult to pin down just what an alternative school is. Vernon H. Smith, Robert D. Barr and Daniel J. Burke of Indiana U. and the International Consortium on Options in Public Education (ICOPE) maintain that no definition can cover all alternatives. However, they have identified many characteristics that optional programs and schools have in common and have attempted to classify the kinds currently in operation. The crucial criteria, they say, are choice, difference and representative enrollment.

1. The school provides an option for students, parents and teachers, and serves a voluntary clientele. The standard school becomes an alternative when sufficient choices are offered so that its clientele is also voluntary.

2. The school is committed to being more responsive to some perceived educational need and is different from the standard school in some identifiable way.

3. The student body reflects the racial and socioeconomic makeup of the community unless it is designed for a target group, such as dropouts, that is itself not representative.

4. Students and teachers have opportunities to participate in decision making about the program and their roles within the school. Each individual's choice and responsibility are increased.

5. The school's stated goals and objectives include developing basic skills and preparation for career/or college, but also have other aims – "improving self-concept; developing individual talent, creativity, and uniqueness; understanding and encouraging cultural plurality and diversity; and preparing students for various roles in society – consumer, voter, critic, parent and spouse."

6. The school relies on "feedback and formative evaluation in developing and modifying curricula and program."

7. The school is usually smaller than the comprehensive high school. Median enrollment of alternative public schools is less than 200.

8. Because the alternative school is smaller, it tends to have fewer rules and fewer bureaucratic constraints on faculty and students.

Other common characteristics are the alternative school's stress on cooperative involvement of students, parents and community from the planning to the evaluation stage, and the fact that it reflects local needs, interests, resources and facilities. It offers basic subjects in ways that humanize students' learning and helps them develop a "sense of identity and personal effectiveness. Although more than a dozen types of alternative schools can be identified, some schools fit none of these types, and other schools are a combination of several," Smith writes.

Chapter 2.

Emphasis on Instruction

Schools that emphasize an instructional approach include open schools and continuous progress schools, where learning is individualized and noncompetitive and multi-age grading is common. In an open school, a number of different learning activities may take place simultaneously in resource centers, and in the successful ones, there is a high degree of structure and planning and coordination. The term "open school" is often used to describe those with an open classroom plan for age-grouped children. Replacing the traditional self-contained elementary classrooms in some areas, they can not be considered "alternative" because students do not elect to attend.

The alternative open school is less concerned with an architectural structure than with the "openness" of learning possibilities. Students are encouraged to define their own needs and, with guidance, decide how they will meet their goals. Guided by a master schedule rather than bells, students may move freely throughout the school to classes or activities they select.

The St. Paul, Minn., Open School was one of the earliest public open schools. It was begun in 1971 through the highly organized efforts of a determined group of parents who petitioned the school board with both philosophy and goals in hand. They found a building, local private funds that were matched with a federal grant under ESEA Title III, and about 500 elementary and secondary students to start the program. Supported now by the public schools, the St. Paul Open School has provided the impetus for other alternatives in the district. In a city where enrollment is declining at a rate near 4% a year, the open school has enough applicants to sustain the lottery selection process that insures it a demographic balance.

In the vanguard of the alternatives movement, open schools were frequently a source of controversy, but the concept has had

noticeable impact on schools in many communities. Though they now account for a much smaller proportion of the total number of alternative schools (from 25% in 1973 to 15% in 1975, according to ICOPE) this is in part attributable to growth in other types.

Another large category of schools with an instructional emphasis – continuation schools – still represent 20% of the total as they did in 1973, indicating a substantial increase in total numbers since that time. ICOPE cites a California law requiring continuation schools as a contributing factor to their increase. Among the earliest kinds of alternatives, continuation schools are designed for dropouts or potential dropouts, teenage parents, and those who have somehow interrupted their education. Reentry programs, behavior modification schools and street academies are a few examples. In some areas the target population, especially of dropout centers, may have only the illusion of choice in attendance. And in this context, good public relations efforts may be needed to overcome the notion in the community that "alternatives" are only for "problem kids."

The number of students who have been helped testifies to the need for the programs and their success in some districts. Smith reports that 25,000 dropouts have benefitted from the Metropolitan Youth Education Center in Denver and Jefferson County, Colo., since it opened in 1964; and the Seattle, Wash., reentry programs and continuation schools brought over 3,000 students back into the public schools in their first year.

But aid for severely troubled youth will not come cheaply. Remedial or "intensive care" type programs will likely cost much more on a per-pupil basis than the standard school, though comparisons with correctional, rather than educational, institutions provide another perspective. Most continuation programs, however, do not require unusual additional expenses. They achieve their purposes through reordering priorities, a faculty committed to counseling as well as teaching, and a vocational emphasis which helps students coordinate school and employment so they can become productive and self-supporting after graduation.

Salt Lake City, Utah: Granite Alternative High School

Granite Alternative High School offers a wide variety of options to students who have not been successful in or satisfied with their programs in conventional schools. These include day classes from

8 a.m. to 2:35 p.m., some of which all students are urged to attend if they can; community education classes, also conducted during the day and evenings except Friday; home study for students who cannot attend regular classes but make contact weekly with their teachers; independent study for specialized projects like research or skill building in a specific interest area; and a work experience program. All of these programs give credit toward high school diplomas. In addition, specialized training programs not offered within the school can be arranged elsewhere and credit granted toward graduation for previously approved courses at vocationally oriented institutions, apprenticeship programs and the like.

Granite Alternative High School is "designed to help those students who have been unsuccessful in traditional programs. It is not designed to replace or compete with the regular high school but to provide education centered around the philosophy that people learn in different ways. It aims to provide a wide variety of learning experiences." To help students obtain their diplomas, it cites these major goals:

1. Keep the student as the primary focus of all activities. Individualize instruction in all classes, beginning at the student's level of competence and continuing at the student's individual learning rate. Offer optional times, places, groupings and approaches for learning activities that will help the student meet graduation requirements.

2. Improve the student's self-concept and image; develop individual understanding and talent; capitalize on uniqueness. Provide a warm, accepting atmosphere for all types of individuals. Staff members are encouraged to first develop a personal relationship with the student, then fill a counseling role as they teach. It is assumed that successful relationships with teachers will produce a change in attitude toward societal authority figures, allowing the student to cope more effectively with society.

3. Provide skills and tools for dealing with real-life situations. Encourage the setting of relevant vocational and lifetime goals.

According to Principal W. Scott Whipple, the 450 day students come to Granite for many reasons, but they are likely to share one

or more of these characteristics: poor self-esteem; phobic reactions to large schools and staff; conflict with authority; drug involvement; and the feeling that they would do better out of a traditional setting. They must be referred from the other six high schools in the district by their administrators or by counselors who have already talked with students and their parents about the alternative program. District counselors may refer those younger than 17 who are not enrolled in a high school or residents over 18 who have not completed graduation requirements. Although referrals are part of the admissions process, in a recent poll 96% of the Granite alternative students said they felt they had freely elected the program. The majority of students enrolled do graduate.

The emphasis on choice and openness is evident, too, in a statement in the community education bulletin: "All ages welcome!" it proclaims. "Granite Alternative High School is for everyone regardless of age, race, religion or place of residence. In addition to those wanting to finish high school or to prepare to pass the GED test, all children, teenagers and adults are welcome in any appropriate class or activity. If you never finished high school, you can now finish free!" Between 500-600 community education students register for the credit and noncredit classes. Courses like English as a second language and adult basic education are offered throughout the day. Others are offered primarily in the evening, but many are 1-1/2 hour sessions so students can register for more than one class per night. Noncredit classes, for which a small tuition is charged, are offered almost entirely at night. Credits are based on community school requirements for attendance and assignments completed. Students may earn their diplomas through the community school program.

Only two years old and growing, the home study option has proved attractive to some 860 students who are not able to attend regular classes. They come from throughout the city, not just from the Granite district, and as a group tend to be older and have responsibilities like child care or employment that conflict with attending class. Eight faculty members have developed a curriculum for 30 different areas. Students make contact with an instructor at least once a week to turn in old assignments and get new ones, along with any help they might need.

Besides these options offering more or less structured curricula to a wide variety of students, many other students receive credit in independent study projects designed with the assistance of the staff. The nature of the project and standards for evaluation are

determined in advance and credit is awarded according to the quality of the completed project and the time it takes.

The Granite Alternative High School program provides vocational training in a humanistic environment. Writing in response to the *Education U.S.A.* survey, Whipple described the focus of the curriculum:

> We believe it is important to have a usable skill upon graduation from our school. Some go on to college but the majority have learned a trade or will continue in a trade school or technical college. Almost half of our 19 certified teachers are vocational teachers. We stress the importance of learning a vocation as part of the school experience. We cover all vocational areas, most of which are coordinated in community locations. We have several vocational settings at our school: home construction, food and restaurant training (they provide our school lunch program as well as gain meaningful training), cosmetology and barbering, photography, and a small graphics and media center.

Credit for work experience is offered when it is staff-approved and in conjunction with enrollment in a vocationally-oriented class. In addition, students may receive credit for approved courses they arrange to take at other training institutions. Many have jobs before graduation.

Students Need 'Warm Climate'

One emphasis at Granite is vocational training; another is providing a warm and supportive environment for the student. Granite students are likely to get birthday cards from the homeroom teacher and begin the day with breakfast parties or volleyball games. Whereas homeroom in many schools is a place to check roll and sell lunch tickets, at Granite it is an integral part of the counseling function. Groups of 15 to 18 students get well acquainted with their homeroom teachers in sessions that meet for a full hour, 15 minutes longer than a regular class. These regular sessions with students allow for discussion of things which concern them – school rules, curriculum and class schedules, personal problems, special activities, service to community and school. An information sheet for homeroom teachers advises them to keep a file on each student, noting interests, hobbies, aspirations and the like to help them know students individually and as an aid to

Innovations Assessed

The May 1976 issue of *Educational Leadership* described a study of the adoption and abandonment of innovative practices in over 3,000 high schools, and reached this conclusion:

> In general, innovations suffering high abandonment are those which tend to be complex, expensive and difficult to administer. Innovations tending to be more durable are generally simpler, less expensive, easier to administer and, in some cases, can be developed and implemented by individual teachers without affecting other ongoing programs of the school or the existing structural framework.

In 33.3% of the schools responding, action learning was fully implemented and operating, and it was being tried on a limited basis in 23% of the others. Only 24 schools had tried it and later abandoned it. Independent study programs had a higher rate of abandonment (2.8% or in 92 schools) but were fully implemented in 22.7% and being tried in 38.1% of the others. In addition, the study shows that the "amount of time required for the diffusion and adoption of a majority of the innovations is significantly less than that reported to be necessary in previous studies."

parental contacts. They are encouraged "to develop rapport and a meaningful relationship" with each homeroom student. "Our goal is to help students succeed, to build their image of themselves." Homeroom teachers are expected to follow up on attendance and achievement, setting up individual conferences and keeping in touch with parents several times a year with good news as well as bad. In effect, the homeroom teacher becomes the student's advocate, and Whipple says the students respond to this personal approach. Problems with the law have diminished and many students have been taken off probation since their enrollment at Granite.

Principal of Granite for eight years, Whipple himself has a background in special education. Of the Granite faculty, he says:

> The makeup of our faculty is varied. There is no special age for relating with students. You either have it or you don't; it's that simple. Our English teachers are older but relate tremendously well with our students and have taught for many years. Our three counselors have 35 years experience in our high schools

and are well respected as some of the finest counselors in the district. The remainder of our teaching staff are young teachers. Many of our teachers hold dual degrees, in special ed and English for example. We have several teachers with teaching certificates as well as counseling certificates, and we are encouraging our entire teaching staff to obtain a counseling credential because we all counsel at our school.

The school's statement of philosophy emphasizes the importance of caring by the staff: "Educators who stress positive ideas to students, so they feel good about themselves, can reverse a student's history of failure." Creativity in using varied methods to motivate and excite students about education is also sought. And a background in alternative programs or training is a definite plus, Whipple believes.

Granite is making its own contribution to training teachers for alternative programs by accepting interns from the U. of Utah and the Indiana U. Alternative School Teacher Education Program. According to Whipple, interns are better prepared for several reasons: "We hand pick those who care about students and who want to understand them. They are creative in their ability to spark enthusiasm in learning, to try something other than the traditional approach or curriculum. They individualize the program to insure every student an opportunity to succeed." Some burnout is to be expected in an alternative school, Whipple believes, but it is minimized through training in the kind of environment in which the student will eventually teach.

Besides the regular teaching and counseling staff, school district personnel provide support services. Among them are a social worker, a psychologist, a district counselor and a district juvenile court liaison person assigned to Granite for part of each week. They conduct group and individual counseling, consult with teachers, act as resource people, and conduct inservice training programs such as those Whipple describes below:

We have at least four major inservice workshops each year, one of which is a two-day experience at a lodge in the mountains. We deal with how to humanize education – to make it meaningful to everyday living. We learn skills that help us improve student self-image, to let them know we care about them and their success. We also work at skills in communicating and listening and skills in motivating students through successful experiences.

How well the faculty succeeds is evident in constant student feedback throughout the year, Whipple says. But they also have a more formal evaluation questionnaire to complete at the end of the year.

People are the key to a successful alternative program, Whipple believes. "We need to select people who care about kids," he says, "and both types of alternatives – in and out of school – are needed." Granite's home study program, for example, is being copied by other districts. Most of all, Whipple says, "We are proud of our graduates. They have direction, goals and are excited about themselves. And they are very appreciative. They come back and tell us that." (For further information: W. Scott Whipple, principal, Granite Alternative High School, 1690 West 4800 South, Salt Lake City, Utah 84107; (801) 266-1312.)

New Rochelle, N.Y.: The Extended Day Program

In New Rochelle when the school day ends for most students, some stay on to take additional classes, others on their way home from work stop for a course before supper and some return in the evening. New Rochelle's Extended Day Program enrolls 250 students from 4 to 10 p.m. in typical high school subjects taught by faculty from the regular day program. For students whose needs conflict with the existing instructional program, Extended Day offers a way to be employed full-time without sacrificing a high school education, to accelerate their program for early graduation, to take remedial classes or make up a course they have failed, or to get a fresh start in a new school environment. And they can do this while maintaining the opportunity to participate in clubs, activities and interscholastic events and to enjoy other privileges normally offered only to day students. In addition, the program gives those who have left school prematurely a place to complete degree requirements and is open on a tuition basis to students over 21 years old and to nonresidents of New Rochelle.

A New York suburb of nearly 80,000 people, New Rochelle has both an urban flavor and a "townly feeling," says high school Principal James Gaddy. Income levels are high and about 70% of its graduates go on to college. Begun in 1971, the Extended Day Program grew out of concern for "the limited academic student . . . at the periphery of the educational situation." Its planners recognized that several different groups needed an after hours

program, but were unlikely to be attracted to the regular evening school, which most perceived as "for dropouts only." Because some of its enrollment was expected to draw from day students who needed a new and different approach, they took care to not merely duplicate the day program. The essential elements of the extended day curriculum include:

- The English and social studies courses were developed with special attention given to helping students become aware of their own ability to receive and send messages, their ability to understand certain forces that affect their lives, and their ability to develop skills to help them solve their own problems.

- Special attention was given to purchasing material that offered both a mature theme and a simplified reading level. In English, areas of concentration included remedial reading, developing a simple writing style, and reading short stories, plays and novels that enrich the students' lives while teaching them to read. Student contracts were developed to help students understand the responsibility and sanctity of the contracts while at the same time allowing them to choose a quarterly enrichment assignment commensurate with their interest and ability. In other courses, special worksheets were developed to help students understand the meaning of reorganization and structure.

Courses in New Rochelle meet two nights a week for 2-1/2 hours and attendance is mandatory. A student having more than five absences per course is dropped for the semester if he/she cannot show they are under a doctor's care. Special curricula for the program have been developed in English, psychology, business math and basic algebra, and there is an intensive business program. Courses in social studies, science and vocational education are offered as well. Although 60% to 70% of the students are upperclassmen, several ninth grade courses accommodate younger students. To encourage independence and resourcefulness, students work on independent projects which comprise 25% of their grade in each class every semester. After the first semester these projects are assigned according to ability level and performed under a learning contract.

A full-time director oversees the program and reports to the high school principal. Links are maintained with the regular day

program through a member of the counseling staff who serves students attending full-time and acts as liaison with the regular school counselor for day students taking an occasional class. Use of day faculty, who "moonlight" in the program, keeps the standard of teaching high, Gaddy believes.

Financially the Extended Day program maintains itself. The district has transferred night school monies to the program, and it receives tuition students from public and parochial schools in the area. Faced with budget choices, New Rochelle no longer operates a summer school; students can make up courses or take additional ones in this program. And the high school space is almost fully utilized from morning to night. "The program enjoys excellent community support," said Gaddy. "We feel it fills a real need." (For further information: James Gaddy, principal, or Thomas Walsh, director, Extended Day Program, New Rochelle High School, 265 Clove Rd., New Rochelle, N.Y. 10801.)

Worcester, Mass.: Returnee Program

Since students who have interrupted their education have often done so because of problems that make reentry even more difficult, the Returnee program at North High School, Worcester, Mass., offers "special handling." Two teachers serve 30-40 students in a self-contained but informal classroom, where students receive support and counseling while they catch up academically. If they have demonstrated the capability of returning to regular classes at the end of one semester, they are placed in 1/2 credit courses with the permission of the instructor. After one year, most are expected to be able to function in the regular school program, but special circumstances sometimes warrant permitting a student to continue in the Returnee program the next year.

Drawing from a city-wide attendance area, Returnee is not designed for students who wish to transfer after a suspension of a week or two or who just want to get out of their regular program. Students must have been out of school for an extended time and be at least 16 years old. Most are 16 to 22 and have been out of school from six months to a year for a variety of reasons – dropout, pushout, pregnancy or difficulties with the law. A few are there under court order, others because their parents have issued ultimatums. But the program is voluntary in that the

students have accepted it as a way of reintegrating themselves into the regular school program and ultimately completing their requirements for a diploma. It is an option they can live with.

The goals of the program, according to the directing teacher, Linda Bergstrom, are to assist the students' return and help them reevaluate their own goals, to develop mutual respect and trust between students and teachers, and to help the students become an integral part of the school community. Returnees share physical education classes with the other students and, from the second semester on, work into elective classes such as art and music or any required courses as they are able. Regular teachers have been "very responsive," Bergstrom says, and returnees seem to have good rapport and do not present discipline problems. The basic or remedial academic work is done in the self-contained class, and it amounts to individualizing for each student in courses they have missed or need to graduate. Bergstrom says that despite the age range students are not widely divergent in achievement levels; she can often adapt similar assignments to the different abilities of the students. Though motivation is not always conspicuous at the beginning of the year, many students develop it as the class progresses. As in many multi-age groupings, older students often help motivate younger ones. Credit for work experience is allowed for those who have jobs. The students find jobs themselves, but employers cooperate by providing monthly student progress reports to help determine what credit should be awarded.

The counseling function is extremely important, Bergstrom believes, because of the students' previous backgrounds. "The first obstacle," she says, "is trying to convince the class members they are not stupid." Gaining a better self-image is essential to their success both in and out of school. "I spend a lot of time in court," she admits.

Bergstrom regrets that a transient population makes follow-up difficult. She feels, however, that success can be measured in part by the fact that many who were in difficulty with the law no longer are and some have been sufficiently interested to continue their education past high school graduation. The Returnee program is a step, she believes, toward what more schools could very easily do to help dropouts become part of the school community again. (For further information: Linda L. Bergstrom, Returnee Program, North High School, 46 Salisbury St., Worcester, Mass. 01601; (617) 791-8711.)

Chapter 3.

Emphasis on Curriculum

Classification by curriculum encompasses an enormous variety of alternatives – both separate and subschool units which take their identify from a particular focus of study. They may be as different from each other as the self-contained classroom of the fundamental school is from the John Ball City Zoo, where the Grand Rapids (Mich.) Environmental Studies Program for sixth graders is based. They may unite students of diverse ethnic origin in a multicultural school or instruct children in a language and culture not native to them. As integration models, magnet schools attract students of all races with specific interests by their unique programs and facilities. Reports suggest that three of these types – magnet schools, schools-within-schools and fundamental schools – are among the most rapidly growing, though not necessarily the most numerous, of the new alternatives.

From Monolith to Mosaic: The Multi-Unit High School

Somewhere there is a tradeoff between the advantages and the disadvantages of bigness, between the benefits of consolidating course offerings and specialized facilities in a comprehensive high school and the loss of identity felt by the "average" student – neither athlete nor merit scholar nor troublemaker. Only a handful of teachers call him by name, the administrators don't recognize him at all and the sea of bodies in the hall obscures the occasional friend. Who cares?

Perhaps it is not chance that cities, where the biggest schools are concentrated, have led the development of alternatives – finding in them a partial solution to vandalism, truancy and other

symptoms of disaffection which, typically, are disproportionately higher in large schools. Ways have been sought to bring the merits and demerits of large schools into better balance – i.e., to humanize the monolith. Whether the subschools are called schools-within-schools, mini-schools or clusters, their numbers are growing.

According to the 1975 ICOPE report, the largest increase in any category of alternative school growth was in the school-within-a-school, from 10% of the total reported in 1973 to 17% in 1975. And clusters, a new category to describe "previously single schools that were reorganized around a number of optional programs," account for another 5%. Each unit of the cluster usually has its own staff and goals and a unique identity fostered in part by a specific curriculum focus and/or approach to instruction. In May 1976 Los Angeles alone had three elementary, three junior high and 12 senior high schools operating school-within-a-school programs, and had adopted guidelines to facilitate the development of others.

The National Assn. of Secondary School Principals' *Practitioner* describes how a mosaic of subschools can transform attitudes within a school:

> Rather than relying upon extrinsic motivators (counseling, student activities, etc.) to overcome the vagueness of a large school, the subschool stimulates students by focusing upon strong, inherent motivators such as recognized opportunity, sense of identity, peer group esteem, active participation and acceptance of responsibility. Many students have a common hunger for the individual attention and warm personal relationships they find in the subschool environment. Part of this feeling comes as a product of the recognition of special interests and because students have an excellent opportunity to voice individual opinions in the subschool community.

While reducing size is generally agreed to be a positive step, some alternative school people have misgivings about the structure. They fear that locating an alternative side by side with the conventional program makes it particularly susceptible to loss of identity within the larger unit, that it can too easily revert to being little more than an administrative substructure. Such proximity also may aggravate any strained relationships between the two faculties which may have developed. One place where the faculties cooperate freely and where the school-within-a-school units have expanded rather than been swallowed up is in North Hunterdon, N.J.

North Hunterdon, N.J.: The Multi-Unit School

In the North Hunterdon (N.J.) Regional High School District, efforts to offer alternatives within the existing high school began in 1973 with four autonomous subschool units, each organized around a particular curriculum focus. By 1976, 17 of these "learning communities" (LCs) operated in two high schools and involved about 45% of the secondary students and faculty in the district. The "learning communities" supplement, but do not supplant, the basic multi-elective program in which students who prefer a more traditional approach to education are enrolled.

North Hunterdon encompasses 178 square miles of a once rural area rapidly becoming suburban as the New York-New Jersey metropolitan area spreads west. Half of the district is still dairy farms; 40% of the residents commute to work outside the county. All but 5% of the students are bused. The 26,000 students come from extremely diverse educational and socioeconomic backgrounds. About 45% of the graduates go on to college.

The learning communities were instituted after much study, planning and local teamwork in response to dissatisfaction of students and staff, according to Dario Valcarcel Jr., project director. The multi-elective program itself had been established in 1968 to achieve greater flexibility in meeting individual interests and needs. Though this strategy was – and is – successful for many students, Valcarcel emphasized, others complained that it was still too much like "old wine in new bottles," still too "institutional and structured to give students a sense of humanity, openness, cohesiveness and congeniality." The usual indicators mirrored this dissatisfaction: truancy, failure and low passing rates were increasing. Teachers felt that too few of them knew enough students well in a school that was fast becoming too big and too crowded. (When the second high school opened in September 1975, 2,400 students were housed in a building designed for 1,850.) North Hunterdon needed a change.

With much support from the superintendent and principals, a group of administrators and teachers researched and visited model schools, investigated differentiated staffing and consulted with New Jersey State Dept. of Education personnel. With further help from the Institute for the Development of Educational Activities (I/D/E/A) and study of the Individually Guided Education (IGE) models, North Hunterdon evolved these principles to guide the development of their program:

- The model was to help all students find themselves in the world of decisions, but also to give them the flexibility of choosing the instructional model that they wish to participate in during a given period of time. The program, in essence, was to be like a "supermarket" of resources.

- The institution has to reflect its humanness to all concerned within its boundaries. Students and teachers must be allowed to choose those alternatives that they mutually feel will help them fulfill their own needs.

- Teaching for content only is as dangerous as to teach solely for skill mastery without concern for the aesthetic and human needs of individuals. Certain students need content as the unifying vehicle by which they learn skills. Others first need to learn the basic skills in order to overcome their own sense of worthlessness, disillusionment and frustrations. Both concepts are provided for in the project model.

As the plan developed, the staff recognized that curriculum-based learning communities could be integrated with the existing multi-electives through a modular block time schedule. Each LC is a self-governing, student-centered unit comprised of a teacher team (usually representing English, social studies, mathematics and science), a guidance counselor and 100 to 125 pupils. North Hunterdon requires LCs for freshmen, who usually benefit most from the smaller unit. Freshmen may choose from five curriculum areas: humanities, liberal arts, vocational-business, mathematics-science, or general education. Students in grades 10-12 who elect a learning community have these options and others as well, including vocational education, performing arts, and philosophical foundations. Some learning communities are multi-graded.

North Hunterdon believes the self-governance aspect of an LC enables teacher-counselor teams to better meet the needs of both faculty and students. With an elected leader who functions much like a mini-principal, the team schedules its time within the modular block (at least three hours) and arranges space (one large room, side by side classrooms or whatever teachers have requested) to accommodate its activities. Teachers work closely to reinforce student learning and to work other subject areas into their own class presentations. How to spend budget allocations are also autonomous decisions. And inservice programs and self-evaluation improve by being motivated from within, rather than imposed from above, Valcarcel says.

LC teachers volunteer for the teams, but many operate within both the LCs and the multi-elective program. All faculty are responsible for five preparations plus one supervisory role or additional course preparation. Department heads supervise instruction for their subjects, but often report to the elected leader of the LC in which they teach. "The department head oversees instruction," Valcarcel says; "the LC leader oversees 'humanity.' " As the instructional leader of the school, the principal involves all LC leaders in his Program Improvement Council.

Self-governance is still basically a means to an end. The goals – what student needs are to be met – are determined through the advisor strategy and the instructional program each LC develops. Every student works with an advisor in a detailed needs assessment program. Profiles emerge from: (a) tests, like the Stern High School Characteristics Index to monitor attitudes and organizational behavior and the Iowa Test of Educational Development; (b) inventories on learning styles; and (c) interviews with students about career goals and human development needs.

Each LC must then define the goals and objectives necessary to meet affective and cognitive needs. Some LCs have a strong curriculum focus; others are more general. All teach at least English and social studies. A variety of instructional modes are possible. Large and small group activity and independent study may go on simultaneously. Continuous progress is common and some students may work at their own pace. A side effect in multi-graded LCs is the tendency for students to ignore age differences and work beyond the level expected for their grade. Mini-courses of varying length may be offered with students as well as faculty participating in the planning. Such flexibility encourages a range of teaching styles, both within an LC and from one LC to another. Valcarcel says some LCs are more advanced in this area than others, depending for the most part on individual faculty. Some might seem very traditional in their teaching; others have developed a multidisciplinary approach. Within each learning community, self-evaluation is going on all the time.

In the three years while the number of learning communities expanded from four to 17, the board of education officially approved the organizational structure, LC leaders were recognized by the local teachers' association and parent groups showed enthusiasm and support for the plan. Objective data also show improvements in the instructional climate and in student achievement. Failures and low grades declined, as well as cutting classes.

Affective growth, a primary objective of the project, is

How To Run a Subschool

Subschools tend to differ widely in size, organization, and distinctness. Some general principles of administration, however, ordinarily apply to the subschool plan:

- √ Each subschool must have identifiable leadership. This may be an assistant principal, a director, a program leader, etc.
- √ Office space and clerical support should be reserved for each subschool. The benefits are functional as well as psychological.
- √ A proper balance must be kept between the separate identities of the subschools and the mainstream school.
- √ The principal's role resembles that of the superintendent of a small district. The principal administers the centralized functions of the campus, and supervises, coordinates and supports the various subschool programs.

- √ Sufficient time must be allowed the subschool's coordinator for the key task of getting to know the students and teachers to build a group identity and esprit.
- √ Whenever possible, the subschool's classrooms should be reserved for the group and should be clustered near the group office.
- √ Teachers should be scheduled within the subschool. Identification is further strengthened if teachers are also assigned to homerooms or advisories in the school.
- √ Teachers should become front-line counselors. Their guidance function must be coordinated with that of the general counselor.
- √ Resource counselors should be assigned to the group rather than be retained in a central unit. A number of small subschools may be pooled for guidance and related services.
- √ Principals should retain their role as supervisors of instruction, school-wide.
- √ Student opinion should be recognized. Student requests are frequently a sound basis for initiating new programs.
- √ Insofar as possible, students should be assigned to a particular subschool throughout the year.
- √ Subschools should provide for a variety of extra-class activities.
- √ Subschool leaders should meet regularly, as a group, with the school's principal. Faculty meetings should be held both at the subschool and the school-wide levels.

From *NASSP Practitioner* September, 1976.

evidenced by the selected conclusions based on the Stern High School Characteristics Index listed below:

- √ LC students are persistently purposeful, serious and task oriented, while maintaining a high enthusiasm for school and a sense of congeniality within the LC.

- √ Students demonstrate great regard for the feelings of others, feel more tolerant and considerate of people they dislike, and sense that there were fewer fights among students.

- √ Cliques appear to be nonexistent in the LCs, adding to the sense of cohesiveness and congeniality.

- √ Students sense that both grade competition and the number of homework assignments within the LCs has increased. They also feel they are not pushed through courses, and that popularity and bluff are now smaller determiners of academic success.

- √ There was an increase in LC student persistence in overcoming difficulty, frustration and embarrassing situations.

- √ Students perceive an increase in well-organized classes and more deliberative or planned actions by both teachers and students.

- √ LC students have more serious discussions among themselves than do other students in the school.

Costs and Inservice

The North Hunterdon staff is happy with the results and feel they have developed a satisfactory solution to the anonymity that alienates high school students. A statement for those interested in replicating the idea covers two other concerns:

- **COST**: The cost of implementing and maintaining the project depends on whether a district wishes to grant salary stipends to LC leaders as North Hunterdon has done, or whether the

district wishes to provide or obtain inservice training from an IGE intermediate agency or regional educational service to help train staff in brainstorming, consensus making, goal setting, curriculum development and plural decision-making. Further, a district or school may want to assign an administrator the responsibility for directing, implementing and evaluating the project. This can be accomplished by reordering priorities and at no new cost to an adopting school district, as has been the case with the present project. Start-up costs – in comparison to management and operational costs – are the areas of most concern for adopters. Management and operational costs are minimal in that the project is a restructuring and reordering of responsibilities and job targets within a school's current budget.

- **INSERVICE TRAINING**: The inservice program involves basic procedures. First, 20% of the staff was involved in leadership training in a two-day inservice workshop for the entire professional staff. Second, a two-day workshop was conducted where the entire staff was trained in brainstorming and consensus making techniques. Trust, openness and positivism were stressed. Third, LCs asked and received training in the reading and content areas for three full days. In addition, teachers continued to receive reinforcement in the reading area throughout the year, as well as guidance in curriculum planning. Fourth, several techniques and skills in human relations, curriculum planning and LC organization were utilized by all concerned. Fifth, the LCs themselves, through brainstorming, consensus making and sharing ideas and problems, have solved most of their problems and initiated change beyond the expectations of all involved in the project.

Total startup, operational and management costs for 885 students were $17,865 or $20.19 per student. Continuation costs per student are $7.64. The project has been funded through ESEA Title III and Title IV-C to provide services and disseminate materials at cost to administrators and staff who wish to participate in the program. (For further information: Dario Valcarcel Jr., Project Director, North Hunterdon Multi-Unit High School, North Hunterdon Regional High School District, Route 31, Annandale, N.J. 08801; (201) 735-5191.)

Fundamental Schools: Alternatives to 'Alternatives'

What educator has not heard the cry "back to basics" – and winced a little? And those associated with the alternative schools that have fought for freer structures, student-directed goals and decision-making, and evaluation on other criteria besides standardized tests, may cringe rather than wince. A rallying cry for those with complaints against the school system, "back to basics" carries with it the unfortunate implication that schools have done away with teaching reading, writing and arithmetic. Not only do educators in most schools – traditional and avant garde – object to this inference, but it is also one that has particularly affected the public's perception of alternative schools.

But those who demand that schools go "back to basics" often mean something more than the teaching of reading or computation skills. They are also talking about an atmosphere – a setting where a more formal order prevails; where the teacher is the central authority and students do not question the reasons for instructions; where dress codes for faculty and students are adhered to; where tests and grades and rank in class encourage competition among students; and where respect for high moral standards and patriotism is expected and enforced. For parents who desire such qualities, the "alternative" may be a fundamental school.

Many parents might be surprised to find out that such a school would be considered an alternative. They might just assume that this is the way schools are, and in some communities they would be right. In others, where the program involves open classrooms, team teaching and an emphasis on individualization, for example, a fundamental school could be one of the voluntary options. The Council for Basic Education (CBE) has identified 19 districts having fundamental schools as alternatives and seven other districts where they are under consideration. According to George Weber, editor of CBE's *Bulletin*, the earliest of these were initiated at the insistence of parents and over some opposition from professional educators in school districts where other options already existed. In a number of districts, among them Houston, Cincinnati and Jefferson County, Colo., the fundamental schools are one of a wide range of choices. CBE welcomes them as "evidence of new interest in basic education" and suggests "their greatest value may turn out to be the influence they have on the regular school in their own communities and elsewhere." But the

council warns: "Basic education does not necessarily mean corporal punishment, dress codes or moralistic indoctrination; indeed, it would be better for the basic schools to confine themselves to curricular reform and reasonable changes in discipline – as some of them have."

The enthusiasm with which some segments of the community have embraced the idea of fundamental schools suggests to many observers that there is more than educational philosophy at work. Those who see this interest as reflecting a desire to return to an earlier, less complicated time are likely to view the fundamental school as a simplistic solution, inadequately preparing students for a rapidly changing society. Yet, they agree that a commitment to choice in public education must recognize the fundamental school as a valid option. Some students clearly thrive in a structured, teacher-centered classroom; both basic skills and human values can be learned in varied settings.

It is the potential absence of human values that bothers some observers. Corporal punishment is an accepted means of discipline at some fundamental schools. In some instances, too, the traditional academic emphasis has encouraged tracking and ability grouping that tend to segregate students within the school, or selective admissions procedures that do the same thing. In North Carolina, a federal judge established stringent rules for student selection at a fundamental school to prevent such grouping. While fundamental schools are not alone in being subject to these dangers, the tendency of their advocates to sanction past traditions seems to make them somewhat more susceptible. Planners alert to such hazards can devise ways to avoid them. One district which has done so is Philadelphia.

Philadelphia, Pa.: Fitler Elementary

With a supportive superintendent and board of education, Philadelphia has established more than 100 alternatives. With this experience, setting up the fundamental school that opened in September 1976 went smoothly, said Leonard B. Finkelstein, District 6 superintendent. Fitler Elementary was established in a predominantly black area, Finkelstein said, primarily because the building was available, but it was to draw from all city districts. Letters went out to more than 100,000 families describing the "academics plus" program – its structured classes; standards for dress, testing, behavior, homework and promotion; and its

emphasis on teaching basic skills. Students are selected from applicants by lottery, in an effort to guarantee racial representation, and transportation is provided by the school district, as it is for other options within the system.

Several thousand students applied. Fitler opened with 330 students in 10 classes (two each in grades 1-5). A triethnic representation of 50% black, 40% white and 10% Spanish-surnamed was sought, but has not been completely achieved – a result Finkelstein attributes in part to the geographic distribution of the population and the long distances many white students would have to travel. The lottery selection has insured a mixture of ability levels both throughout the school and in each of the self-contained classrooms. When the first floor of the building, now occupied by a day care center, becomes vacant, the school is expected to expand through grade 8. Costs are comparable to the general funding level; some support came from Title IV-C, ESEA. As for the results, "It's too early for a full reading," Finkelstein acknowledges, but "I'm pleased." It's a "good, solid elementary school," he says.

At the same time Fitler was being established as a separate school, 15 other schools were designated to gradually revamp their programs towards the "academics plus" focus after discussions with staff and community. While their basic student population remains unchanged, those schools with extra room can accommodate some of the applicants unable to get into Fitler. In one instance black applicants were referred to a school in a predominantly white area, thus achieving a more representative racial balance. In the discussion over which would be designated "academics plus" schools, Finkelstein said, many principals expressed the feeling that some highly organized schools with clearly stated academic goals had been doing much the same thing all along. This became, as Finkelstein puts it, " a very sensitive point." It is this "sensitive point" that directly relates to public perceptions of schools in many districts where the "back to basics" cry is heard. In some districts, the cries have died down when the protesters learned that schools are already doing what is being advocated. Counteracting erroneous assumptions, say community relations specialists, requires an efficient school information service that publicizes exemplary programs and a staff that can communicate the goals of the instructional program to the public in understandable language. Greta Pruitt, former principal of the Pasadena Alternative School and now principal of the Los Angeles Area E Alternative School, believes school leaders

themselves are often responsible for this misunderstanding. In their eagerness to define a fundamental school as a "3R" school, she says, the school leadership may – whether intentionally or otherwise – convey the impression that the other alternatives, or even the standard program, do not teach basic skills. And they may also oversell the idea that this type of school is "the answer" to "whatever is wrong." Overselling is a danger when presenting any innovation to the community – and one which could raise false expectations that could backfire in dissatisfaction if results seem less than promised. "We dare not sell any optional program as the answer," Pruitt warns.

Grand Rapids, Mich.: Southeast Neighborhood Education Center

A district with many answers is Grand Rapids, Mich., whose 20 alternatives have been systematically developed over the last 10 years. But the Grand Rapids public schools had nothing to do with starting one of its fundamental schools. At the request of parents at what was formerly a small Catholic school, the district took over one already in operation. The Southeast Neighborhood Education Center serves about 80 inner-city children whose school was originally supported under the model cities program as a nonpublic school. Extremely popular with its patrons, the Urban League and other community agencies, the school had established a strong tradition of parent participation. When the money crunch hit, parents petitioned the school board to take it into the public school system as a separate alternative fundamental elementary school.

Unlike Grand Rapids' ungraded elementary schools, the Southeast Neighborhood Education Center contains grades 1-6, is more authority-centered than other Grand Rapids schools and is oriented toward teaching basic skills. When the school "went public," the staff did, too. Four teachers and two volunteer assistants are responsible for the children in self-contained classrooms, where two grade levels may exist in one room. The school has its own volunteer administrator, but it also shares a principal with another school. Although there is no specific attendance area for the school, youngsters tend to come from the immediate neighborhood. Admission requires an application, an interview and agreement with the goals and standards of the school before acceptance by the parental governing board. Parents,

for instance, must agree to the behavior standards and dress code and should be prepared to participate actively in various phases of the program and governance of the school.

Houston, Tex.: Magnet Schools

Sharing many characteristics of a resource learning center, but usually focusing on a specific curriculum, the magnet school is a newcomer to the alternative movement. Yet, like the fundamental school, neither the idea nor the practice is really new.

What is a magnet school? It is as much an idea and an atmosphere as a place or a facility – though location may be important and many are admirably well-equipped. It is less a structure or an innovation than a means to an end – magnets use methods and organizational structures successful in other schools, and create some new ones of their own. Although not so much for specific groups as for all students, most magnets have quotas in order to be representative of the district as a whole.

Magnet schools are springing up all over the country, particularly in large cities. Their goal is to bring educational excellence to more and more children, in conjunction with what is often elusive, voluntary integration. "Magnet schools are neighborhood schools that are open to students outside the neighborhood," according to Donald R. Waldrip, consultant for the Cincinnati public schools. To the area population are added students from other neighborhoods who are attracted by the quality of the special program the magnet offers. A major appeal of the concept was stated by Rep. Barbara Jordan (D-Tex.) at the 1976 National Conference on Magnet Schools:

> The magnet school concept answers the charge that integration means a leveling down and not a leveling up. You can show that integration is accomplished by a leveling up. And that's important.

The concept of attracting students by the excellence of a school's specialized program is not new. Schools for students talented in the performing arts or academically gifted in math and science have been standard in some cities for years. Employing this concept to achieve voluntary integration, however, is relatively recent. And leaders in many urban centers are optimistic that

magnet schools offer a way to circumvent a lot of the hard feelings engendered within a community by forced busing – and a way to improve the available educational options at the same time. That courts will accept magnet school plans in response to desegregation mandates is encouraging because citizens can have a say in the way integration is accomplished and because upgrading educational programs will continue under desegregation.

The conference's *Magnet Reporter* describes four ways magnet schools can assist in integration:

- They reduce the racial dominance of one school by providing educational programs that will attract enough students from other races to integrate the school.

- Students from different races and from nonintegrated schools can be brought together at integrated schools outside their attendance zones.

- Quality educational programs not available elsewhere help to reduce "white flight" and to bring new families into the district.

- New facilities can be located in one-race areas needing additional school capacity without creating other racially imbalanced schools.

Certain characteristics are necessary, the *Magnet Reporter* states, to prevent magnets from becoming unintentionally segregated, as they sometimes have in areas where integration was not a primary goal. "It is only with the addition of certain constraints on enrollment by race and ethnic origin, together with providing free transportation, extensive publicity, community contact and other safeguards, that the magnet school becomes an approach to achieve integration. Without these constraints, safeguards and additional educational components, the integration objective would be difficult, if not impossible, to achieve."

Magnet Schools: A Way to Voluntary Integration

The magnet school plan for the Houston Independent School District illustrates the kinds of effort needed for the program to be implemented successfully. Devised to supplant a court-ordered

integration plan which paired 22 schools back in 1970, the magnet plan began operation, with court approval, in September 1975. Since Phase I of Houston's Quality Integrated Education program (QIE) has been in effect, the enrollment decline in affected schools has stopped and by the end of 1975 Houston had 15 fewer one-race schools (as defined by the court) than it had in the preceding year. The original magnet program in 31 elementary, junior and senior high schools was expanded in September 1976 to 45 programs in 43 different locations. Through the voluntary transfer of 5,454 students by December 1976 (about 9% more than required by the plan submitted to the court), nearly one-fourth of Houston's 212,000 students are either in magnet programs or on campuses where magnet programs take place. Even though it is still too soon for a comprehensive evaluation of academic success, early indicators show that quality education for Houston students in a voluntary integrated setting may be an attainable goal.

According to the magnet schools director, Fay Bryant, Houston was able to initiate its plan successfully because the public was ready. And making the public ready was – from the beginning – part of the plan. Houston has black and white students in roughly equal proportion, and about 20% Mexican-American students. A 21-person task force gave these racial and ethnic groups representation and involved them in the planning process. An extensive needs assessment had been conducted the preceding year, and several successful alternative schools were integrating through voluntary enrollment without compulsory attendance zoning. The task force sought the views of all interested parties – from government agencies to citizen groups – and held two rounds of advertised public hearings. The task force members recommended the magnet school concept and proposed a triethnic administrative task team to formulate the plan. A court-appointed, biracial "watchdog committee" was consulted about all aspects of the plan and its development. The community was continuously involved in planning and became accustomed to the magnet school idea before any mention was made of the specific schools that would be affected.

The administrative task team, which had the responsibility to implement task force recommendations, included an assistant superintendent from each of Houston's six administrative areas. (They would later serve as QIE coordinators in their areas.) Program selection followed three guidelines: (1) some programs would draw across attendance zone boundaries to increase the

Fact or Fiction?

Some People Think:

- Alternatives are for "problem kids": dropouts, pregnant girls, troublemakers or low achievers.
- Alternative programs are unstructured and require little or no discipline on the part of students and faculty.
- Alternatives are staffed by young teachers too unconventional to function in a regular school.
- Alternatives cost more than regular programs.
- Alternative schools don't teach the basics.
- Graduates of alternative schools will have trouble getting into college.

But Evidence Shows:

- Alternatives offer different approaches that can adapt to each student's most effective learning style.
- The successful alternatives are structured, have clearly defined goals and built-in means of evaluation.
- There is no special age for relating with students, and creativity is an individual matter. Options for teachers give them the opportunity to develop the best in themselves.
- Many alternative programs are sustained at no or slight additional per pupil cost. Almost any change involves temporary transitional expenses which can often be funded out of budget reallocations.
- Objective criteria indicate that cognitive growth is at least as great as in conventional schools, while affective growth usually improves.
- A national survey of colleges and universities found the majority were willing to admit students without class rank, grade point averages and the usual transcript of courses.

integration of the three ethnic groups; (2) other programs were designed to maintain the enrollment of each group where triethnic enrollment already existed and to forestall flight; and (3) as specified by the task force, programs were initiated at previously paired schools to upgrade their educational quality. An enrollment distribution of 40% black, 40% white and 20% Spanish-surnamed was to be achieved where separate components were established.

To determine where and what programs would be implemented, the six area superintendents surveyed every principal in the district. Principals were asked to study the list of programs suggested by the task force and to discuss it with their faculties, parent-teacher associations, advisory committees and community leaders. Based on this input and data from the needs assessment survey, principals could request magnet school programs for their buildings. Of Houston's 247 principals, 116 requested magnet programs. The administrative task team, area superintendents and the district superintendent made the final program choice according to these criteria:

- √ Requests from principals approved by the area superintendents;
- √ Community interest in projected programs;
- √ Qualified staff already in the school;
- √ Locations easily accessible by freeways and main thoroughfares;
- √ Programs within the educational, integration and location guidelines established by the task force;
- √ Facts and inferences from the needs assessment survey.

Top priority for program development went towards integrating schools, then to upgrading the 22 paired schools. The rest of the 43 schools in Phases I and II were selected on the basis of location; whether or not they had outstanding programs already in progress; and whether or not a magnet program might stabilize enrollment.

That no existing school was dislocated when implementing the QIE plan was an important factor, Bryant said, in the plan's acceptance. And since no empty school buildings were available, the new programs had to utilize existing empty space scattered

throughout the district as a result of declining enrollments. This meant a network of units with 100 to 250 students each.

What Kinds of Programs?

Programs are basically of four different types. Both "add-on programs" and "separate and unique schools" provide every student with instruction in a specific area by specially trained teachers. Their purpose is to attract enough students of other racial and ethnic groups from throughout the district to integrate a one-race school, or to stabilize the ethnic composition of an integrated school by discouraging flight from the attendance zone. Three of four music academies for K-6 are add-ons; one of these is in the inner-city. The separate and unique schools include elementary and secondary fundamental schools and a senior high school. Originally one of the paired schools, the elementary fundamental school is in a predominantly Mexican neighborhood where the needs assessment survey showed many of the children were handicapped in the use of English. Since this school has a fundamental emphasis (which Bryant defines as an instructional focus on basic skills development rather than a concern for behavior and dress codes), "it has shown a significant increase in test scores," she said, and has achieved the desired racial mix as well.

A majority of magnets follow the "school-within-a-school" approach. Housed on existing campuses where students in the geographic attendance zones are often predominantly one race, these attract students from throughout the district. Students spend two-thirds of their academic time in the magnet curriculum, but spend the rest with students in the existing school. All nonacademic time – lunch, recess, assemblies, etc. – is also shared. Thus the magnet students are integrated throughout the entire school day. These numerous elementary and secondary magnet programs can still admit minority students but have waiting lists for whites. Among other schools-within-a-school are the bilingual/multicultural schools for grades K-6, the Montessori school for children ages 4-7, and the secondary programs for engineering professions, petro-chemical careers and aerodynamics. The magnet school pupil/teacher ratio of no more than 25:1, compared to the 28:1 average in regular programs, applies also to the school in which this magnet is located. Besides equalizing the

load for all building faculty, this ratio has encouraged transfers to the regular program and aided the integration effort.

Five elementary "cluster centers" also integrate students from racially isolated, nonmagnet schools. These children spend several days each year participating in experiences that would not normally be available while they study other cultures, people and customs, and investigate career opportunities, nature and ecology. The clusters take an innovative multi-media approach. For grades 1-3, the Children's Literature Center emphasizes reading through art, drama, song and dance. Commercial camps in the area provide students in grades 4-6 study opportunities through an Outdoor Learning Centers program – at no expense to the student. Almost 15,000 students are involved in this program. At the Career Orientation Center, older elementary students get hands-on experience in science, travel and transportation, communication, business and industry, office careers and food services while they learn about employment possibilities in these fields.

Students from anywhere in the district may apply to any of the magnet schools and, if accepted, are provided transportation if the school is out of their attendance zone. A brochure listing the magnet programs and their locations, organization, focus and purpose cited these criteria for student selection: "legal ethnic mix; student interest; parental approval; grades (either above or below grade level in some instances); standard achievement test scores; and an interview with the student, and, in some cases, the parents." To help spread the word, the brochure (with its attached application blank) goes home with the report cards of elementary children and a copy is given to all high school students. It is distributed through the PTA, church groups, counselors and the magnet schools as well. Mid-year transfers throughout the district continue as students learn the details about specific magnet programs that interest them.

Besides transfers to magnets, the school district's triethnic transfer policy allows a student whose race at his or her zoned school is above the district-wide average to transfer, with transportation provided, to any other school where that race is below the average. On the other hand, one of the most unpopular aspects of the magnet program is the transfer restriction that exists to safeguard integration. A student may not transfer to a magnet school if leaving his or her assigned school will reduce its integration percentage. Magnet schools adhere closely to the established enrollment guidelines (40-40-20), and qualified students are admitted on a first come, first served basis to reflect the

districtwide ethnic ratio for their particular instructional level. If quotas are not reached by the beginning of the second semester, students of other races may be admitted, but 10% of the designated places will be held open while the district continues to recruit minority students. Once admitted, students are assured continued attendance until they complete the program.

The Selection Process

Successful implementation of the Houston magnet schools plan required staff as well as community participation at various levels. All magnet school sites were selected with the approval of the principal and the area superintendent. Teachers were chosen (from the over 700 who applied) for their special competencies, through criteria based on interest, aptitude, personality and such traits as innovativeness and effectiveness. But no school lost a large percentage of its most experienced or competent teachers to new programs. Staff members should also reflect the districtwide ethnic proportion for each instructional level, with acceptable variances of 10% and 15% at the elementary and secondary levels respectively.

Summer staff development programs for principals were enlarged to include teachers as well. Implementation of the programs and providing the necessary support services took place through regular organizational channels in the district. Where possible, the transportation department correlated bus routes to allow magnet school students to ride regular school buses or minivans when their numbers were small.

The mechanism for evaluation of the magnet programs has been established, although no major conclusions have yet been drawn. It will be done by the school district's evaluation and research division, along with an outside auditing and evaluation firm. Both the feasibility of the educational concept and the integration strategies will be monitored and reported to the court. Under the court approved review process, Houston has leeway to change campuses and programs as required to meet educational and desegregation objectives.

A frequently expressed concern is the effect magnets may have on other schools in a district. Will regular educational programs suffer as attention and money are poured into the highly visible magnet schools, which in comparison serve only a few students? According to Bryant, Houston has tried to insure that the good

things happening in the magnet programs are sent on to other schools to upgrade education for all students. As curriculum materials are developed, for example, availability lists are distributed and other schools are urged to take advantage of whatever is adaptable to their own programs. Intensified staff development has brought together instructional coordinators from magnets or other schools and teachers from throughout the district to insure a "spillover effect." It was once feared that magnets – by pulling out the more talented students – might impoverish music, art, science and other specialized programs within a school. This has not happened, Bryant said. Instead, new talent has emerged, and more students have an opportunity to develop their special abilities.

Looking back after a year and a half of operation, would they have done anything differently? Not much, said Bryant, but "we went in quickly, and even with advance planning we could not do some things until official court approval came." Since faculty were selected during the summer, the curriculum development office, all principals and the administrative task team had to carry the major load of program planning. Beginning the second year, teachers had the opportunity to participate in curriculum development. Though Houston would have liked more time, there are no major regrets or changes. Each magnet school stresses its own unique program. "Our strongest point," Bryant maintains, "is that they are really excellent programs. We can say to parents, your child gets the basic skills thrust (as do children in the other schools) and the specialty as well." If the evaluations bear out the quality expected from Houston's Quality Integrated Education plan, it would seem the plan is there to stay. (For further information: Fay Bryant, Magnet Schools Director, Houston Independent School District, 3830 Richmond Ave., Houston, Tex. 77027; (713) 623-5011.)

Chicago, Ill.: Walt Disney Magnet School

Chicago's Disney school is a three-level, glass-walled building designed for 1,800 students, with a 600-person communications center, an 80-car underground garage with a play plaza on the roof and an additional five acres of the 11-acre lake-front campus given over to play areas and a public park. Each level serves a different age group. About 600 children are in three 8,000 square foot

areas, each with a view of the lake. Administrative rooms, the gymnasium, dining and multiple-use space and teacher training areas are arranged around a faculty planning area at the center of each level, with the emphasis on open space. The different age groups share a multi-media library, art and music workshops, science and math laboratories and health service suites. The one-acre communication arts center houses a theatre in the round and "flexible space for every kind of art studio from music, dance and painting to weaving and photography." It is planned for community use, adult education and supplementary programs for other schools, as well as for its regular students.

While both Walt Disney's design and its location (in an expensive lakefront area of the city) might suggest an elite population, it draws students aged 3-13 years of varied abilities and backgrounds from 10 districts in northside Chicago. Intended as the first of seven magnets, it is one of 11 alternatives which use the Individually Guided Education (IGE) curriculum – that is, it individualizes instruction to allow for "differences among pupils in rates of learning, learning styles, and levels of motivation" and uses multi-age grouping of pupils, a multi-unit school organization, team teaching, intensive home-school communications, and a varied system for measurement and evaluation. Besides individualized instruction, Disney's stated goals include encouraging each child "to develop a positive self-image in terms of his or her own culture." Parents come to the school for registration during the annual open-application week each spring, announced by flyers distributed to schools and community agencies in the target areas. A computer selects applicants to reflect the percentages of minorities in the area.

Besides the main academic program for the regular students, a unique magnet feature opens the communication arts center daily to about 400 children, ages 8-13, from other public schools around the city. For a three-week period, classes in a given age group are bused with their teachers to the arts center's facilities. Chicago principals make written application for their students to participate; which classes will attend is decided at the home school. Disney balances the scheduling of classes with attention to the student's racial, ethnic and socioeconomic mix.

At the center, students are assigned to 100-pupil teams which reflect the same mix. Each team plans activities in music, drama, art and dance. A few selected students from each class also get instruction and practice in photography, filmmaking, radio and television and creative writing, depending on their expressed

interests. Teachers undergo a three-hour preparation session before bringing their classes to the center, and the three weeks in team assignments at the center is a kind of inservice program for them. Disney is now trying to assess what effect participation may have on the home school. The programs vary with the age group of students and the creativity of the faculty from one session to the next. Each session culminates in a student-presented program in which all have an opportunity to be both participant and audience. Parents also come to watch. The emphasis is on doing as well as on learning to value what others have done.

The competence and enthusiasm of the staff are the keys to a successful program of this type, according to Al Weismeyer of the communication arts center. In addition to being certified teachers, all 20 of the center's faculty are dedicated and accomplished practitioners of their art, be it sculpture or dance, photography or music. They were selected from a great many applicants from the 20,000 Chicago public school teachers for their creativity both in and out of the classroom. Teachers meet frequently, Weismeyer said, to plan new or different team activities. They are "phenomenally good and very hardworking," he said.

Before starting a similar program, Weismeyer believes a lot can be learned from seeing one already in operation and talking to people about program and facilities planning and use of open space. "We have so many visitors, we've stopped keeping track," he said. "We're always glad to have people come." (For further information: Thomas McElroy, Walt Disney Communication Arts Center, 4140 North Marine Drive, Chicago, Ill. 60613.)

Chapter 4.

Resources and Facilities

Where the emphasis is on resources and facilities, the alternative is likely to be a learning center that has specialized, expensive facilities in central locations, an educational park encompassing programs for various levels in a complex of buildings, or no school building at all. Many of these are oriented toward experiential learning and/or community-based education.

Schools Without Walls

Since its opening in 1969, Philadelphia's Parkway has been an example that has inspired many other school-without-walls programs designed to take students out of the classroom and into and around the city for learning experiences of every conceivable description. One year later came Chicago's Public High School for Metropolitan Studies, "Metro High." And soon other school districts followed with their version. By now, virtually every major urban center and a great many suburbs have some sort of alternative program that systematically uses many of the city's resources. Art and history classes are held in the museums; science classes are at the aquarium, the zoo, the botanical gardens and the planetarium; economics can be seen first-hand in banks and business education in retail establishments. These and similar course offerings have become commonplace. Underlying many of these programs is the philosophy stated by Chicago's Metro High – that the urban schools, in addition to the successful teaching of the three Rs, have the responsibility of helping students become familiar with the city in which they live. In the process, they become aware of the wealth of knowledge that is available in their immediate environment and they learn how to make these resources work for them.

Metro High, says Principal Nathaniel Blackman Jr., reflects the idea of the high school as not so much a "place" as a "growth period" and a "social condition." Before the subject matter must come an atmosphere, he maintains. The atmosphere is casual at the office building Metro occupies in the Loop area of Chicago. Here, students meet individually with teachers and relax in the lounge between classes. Although many classes are held in facilities throughout the downtown area, others, including the majority of math classes, are given at the school.

The "learning unit," divided into 10-week cycles, is the basic course offering. Nine weeks of concentrated learning and one week of evaluation may be directed by a staff teacher or offered by one of the numerous cooperating teachers from around the city. Businessmen, art historians, doctors and other professionals may give courses on their own or as a team with regular school staff. For example, personnel from a bank, a stock brokerage firm, a department store and a manufacturer cooperated with a Metro High teacher to give an economics course; and a staff member at a local TV station taught a course there in TV production. About 30% of the course offerings are taught by participating organizations. Two teachers have full-time responsibility for developing and coordinating programs based on community resources, which is a time consuming process, Blackman says. Besides specific course offerings both in and out of school, Metro High students engage in independent study projects and work at nonpaying jobs or as lab assistants in community organizations. Some also take classes at the city colleges. And some become teachers themselves – offering short electives in topics like home repairs and popular music.

As Metro High was becoming established, Blackman observes, it became apparent that those who want to bring about change often don't know how or even what kind of change they want. The "ideal" is one of planning fully, getting total involvement at various levels of decision-making, and having a new facility since "people will judge you on how it looks," says Blackman. But Metro was the opposite. Opening one month after Blackman was appointed principal, the staff made the rules as they went along and they evolved through trial and error. Could it be done again, he would like more planning time and more opportunity to develop a closer relationship with "everyone involved" – parents, community and school people. But the important thing, he maintains, is that teachers must feel they can bring about change as well as inspire students to succeed. Consequently, many of

Metro's unorthodox approaches teach to the level of the student. There are even some noncredit courses that allow students to work at their own rate.

Instead of letter grades, teachers and students jointly evaluate the student's performance during the cycle and students receive credit only when they have completed the requirements to their own and their teacher's satisfaction. If progress is not satisfactory, students can arrange to complete the requirements within a specified time or to repeat the course for credit. Students have no "rank in class," says Blackman. They are all "number two."

Although Metro's 350 students, aged 14-17, are selected by lottery from about six times as many applicants to reflect the racial and ethnic composition of Chicago, 65% to 75% of the graduates go on to college – a much higher proportion than the usual city-wide average. Blackman says he can't account for this – apart from the fact that many students suddenly get "turned on" when they find that learning is fun in a casual atmosphere and "not the drudge it had become." Also, by exposure to post-secondary classes while still in high school, some students begin to see higher education as a feasible goal. Blackman believes that an improved self-concept and a new "sense of possibility" make the difference for many students. Metro's dropout rate of 2% to 3% is one of the lowest in the city.

The lottery selection process protects Metro High from being viewed as a school for the elite. But Blackman thinks students now seek entrance for different reasons than they did six years ago. The earliest groups were looking for a new philosophy and method of education; many now, he believes, are leaving other schools because of dissatisfactions – as with race relations, changes in the neighborhood or the academic preparation they are receiving. The community looks at Metro High as one of the outstanding schools in the city, and that reputation attracts students discontent with where they are, Blackman believes.

What major changes have taken place in the school over the years? "Probably the introduction of more structure," Blackman says. Metro High has tended to continue things that work and Blackman notes that his day's activities are much more predictable now than they were in the early years at the school. But while this predictability makes things easier, there is a hazard – e.g., the loss of creativity. Of Metro's 25 teachers, 16 have been there three years or more. A school needs to change teachers and administrators from time to time, he believes, but in the declining teacher market, mobility is sharply decreased.

Still, Blackman believes the essential nature of Metro High remains unchanged: "A sharing of ideas, a community atmosphere; a place where education is fun and people can laugh . . . where they respect each other. Our students feel they are part of the program," Blackman affirms, "and that the program is part of them." (For further information: Nathaniel Blackman Jr., principal; Chicago Public High School for Metropolitan Studies, 223 North Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill. 60601; 312: 641-8162.)

The Action Learning Center

In the Chicago suburb of Skokie, Ill., is another example of a school-without-walls – the Niles Township Action Learning Center (ALC). It is "totally different" from Metro High, says learning coordinator Robert Fizzell, proving that the same concept can work in very different communities, with different kinds of students, and on a much smaller scale. With headquarters in a mobile classroom next to Niles West High School, the ALC holds no scheduled classes. The 53 students, sophomore to seniors aged 14-20, work individually under learning contracts for independent study and community-based experiences developed in cooperation with their advisors.

Fizzell characterized the ALC students, for the most part, as those who don't get much attention in a conventional school – and he says the small size of the ALC is "critical" to their success. Most were "minimum participators;" some were dropouts; many had a high rate of truancy. Most were not trouble-makers, but they remained unnoticed either because they were quiet or because they just weren't there. (Attendance is one of the criteria for successful evaluation.) Because many of them have not done well in the regular school program, building their self-concepts is emphasized. The handbook for community resource volunteers states, however, that the students are "different" only insofar as all people are different:

> Our students are of average intelligence, average motivation and average behavior. They are not "problem kids." They are not assigned to the ALC. They were not rejected by the traditional school. They chose the ALC because they felt they were not progressing as well as they could in the regular school. Since the ALC requires that students work on their own in the community, we expect our students to be more responsible than

average. They must be more mature and must want to work with adults and be treated as adults. They must have a high degree of self-discipline. Why do they choose the ALC? They feel they cannot learn enough through the textbook and lecture approach of the regular school. These students want a chance to pursue a subject on their own time schedule through many ways of learning. Particularly, they prefer to learn by doing. There is a normal distribution between professional, career and vocationally oriented students.

ALC students have no "typical" day, but they are expected to follow some specific procedures. Monday morning begins with a group meeting where all students share in the decision making. After that, they meet with their coordinator to decide on activities for the day or week or begin to fulfill their contract obligations. Each student keeps a journal, recording experiences and opinions, and each meets regularly with advisors for tutoring and evaluation. They account for their time throughout the school day on a signout schedule and assume responsibility for getting from place to place on their own. Instead of report cards, monthly meetings are used to inform parents of student progress.

Students earn credit toward a regular high school diploma by satisfactorily completing the objectives stated in their learning contract. Each contract describes the goals, how they will be attained and the means of evaluation. The contract must be approved by the ALC coordinator who is supervising the student, a teacher in the regular school who is a specialist in the field of study, and anyone else who is involved as a resource. When students have achieved their objectives, they receive credit but no grade; a paragraph describing their accomplishment is attached to their transcript.

The primary focus of the ALC is experiential learning, but other modes are employed as well: traditional classes, student-organized study groups, independent study through library research and programmed learning, and tutorials. The normal course load is four credits per semester, but only a few credits are earned through experiential learning.

At the heart of the action learning program are the community resources – nearly 30 in the 1975-76 school year. Finding and developing good resources is one of Fizzell's most difficult and time-consuming tasks. It's "all politics and sales," he says, and estimates that it takes about five hours to develop each resource to the point that a student can be placed. Good media coverage is an

invaluable aid. The smaller organizations are better than the large ones, he adds, for giving a student the whole picture of what goes on. The students must be able to interact with the resource people, who also must serve as teachers, not just take advantage of free student help. Some have been eliminated from the program because students were not adequately instructed, Fizzell says, but most are conscientious and provide leads, references and even jobs when students require them. Responsibilities of all sides are clearly defined in a community resources handbook.

Getting an action learning program going is not without its hazards. Liability is one of them. Fizzell emphasizes that parents must fully understand and approve the programs and the responsibilities of each student to prevent the school from being sued by those who were not fully informed. And then there's the problem of image. Some people think such alternatives are corrupting standards, or view them as a "den of drugs." The Action Learning Center does have some drug use, Fizzell concedes, but a decrease in heavy use has been documented – presumably resulting from the effort and the time that action learning requires of students. Occasionally a student will drop out because a program is too demanding. Hostility from regular teachers and resistance from counselors has also been noted. And when Fizzell's work began to lean towards the administrative side, the teachers union, which had supported him as a teacher, became an adversary. Time demands on the learning coordinators are also great. Fizzell says that a 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. day is not unusual and he is sometimes back in the evening, while the part-time coordinator teaches what amounts to a full day for a regular teacher.

Many of these difficulties, Fizzell believes, are not unusual for alternative schools. When established within an existing school, action learning programs appear to be fairly well accepted. And despite the degree of organization and coordination required, action learning remains one of the more durable innovations. (For further information: Robert Fizzell, Niles Action Learning Center, Skokie, Ill. 60076; 312: 966-3800.)

Walkabout

Probably the ultimate in action learning and community-based education is the Walkabout model – named after the Australian "walkabout." This is a six-month endurance test in which the

aborigine youth passes to adulthood by living alone in the wilderness and demonstrating self-reliance, responsibility, confidence and the ability to survive. In the May 1974 *Phi Delta Kappan*, Maurice Gibbons suggested that an adaptation of this Australian rite of passage would be a better defined and more effective transition to adulthood for youth in our society than what most secondary education now offers. He recommended an alternative curriculum focusing on several challenge areas: adventure, creativity, service, practical skills and logical inquiry. Real life experiences in these areas, chosen by the students as challenges, would extend their interests and capabilities beyond the classroom and make them responsible for their own successes and failures. Widespread interest in the idea was evident from the letters generated by the article. Phi Delta Kappa began a newsletter, *Walkabout*, as an information sharing service to describe how schools are implementing the learning concept.

According to Gibbons, a true walkabout includes all of the following elements:

Challenges:
Students are required to complete challenges in all seven areas: adventure, creativity, logical inquiry, service, practical skill, job-work and cognitive skill development.

Contracts:
Never assigned by the teacher, specific challenges are developed by the student in consultation with a teacher and parent and are confirmed by all parties in a written contract.

Extension:
In each contract, students challenge themselves to achieve a level of performance they are not capable of in the beginning. They contract to extend their ability as far as their capacity allows.

Improvement Assessment:
Each student is evaluated according to the degree of improvement in personal behavior in each challenge area – not in comparison with others or against some arbitrary standard. The student takes part in the evaluation.

Out-of-Classroom Activity:
Work involves a significant amount of activity out of class at some appropriate field site, and regularly includes contact with adults and children.

Individual-Group Balance:
There is a balance between those challenges students work on individually and those done cooperatively with other students.

Development of Necessary Competencies:
Students must develop competencies they lack in the beginning. The Walkabout program requires students to identify the personal, interpersonal, technical and cognitive skills needed to meet particular challenges, and to plan a sequence of activities which will enable them to develop those competencies before the final activity is attempted.

Student Presentations:
From the beginning, students anticipate making a formal presentation of their Walkabout accomplishments to a gathering of peers, teachers, parents and other members of the community.

Learning Unlimited

At North Central High School in Indianapolis, Ind., a director with administrative and organizational experience in alternative schools and a background in counseling was recruited to head a staff of teachers whose common characteristics included the desire to try new ideas and to work more closely with students. Learning Unlimited began in September 1974 under a $970,000 grant from the Lilly Endowment, with gradual phasing into the regular school budget over a five-year period. Its objective was to create a model for change by experimenting with about 30 curricular innovations and documenting their adaptation elsewhere in the school system. Demonstrating a variety of teaching modes, rather than altering academic content, and incorporating the community into the curriculum are important phases. Several of the techniques Learning Unlimited has modeled – such as computer assisted instruction, foreign travel for credit and competency-based instruction – have already been adapted by departments within the school.

According to Gary Phillips, the program's director, the unique and essential quality of Learning Unlimited revolves around individualized learning which correlates academic work with the challenges of real life experiences. This encourages both affective and cognitive growth. Each student is required to create a project every semester in each of seven areas: adventure and field experience; creativity and enrichment; service; practical skills; logical inquiry and research; cognitive skills; and futurism and decision making. With guidance from parents, teachers and perhaps a resource person, student write course proposals stating their general goals, specific objectives, planned activities and methods of evaluation. It also lists resources, a schedule for meetings with the teacher and a completion date. Besides keeping a daily journal, students do detailed weekly written summaries of their work for their course instructors. These are often evaluated by English teachers as well to check on communication skills. Finally, students must justify their grade and present some "proof" of their achievement to their peers – perhaps a lecture, a slide show or a work of art. Students in the program duplicate the course content of the regular classes, take the same departmental exams (most of which are now competency-based following the lead of Learning Unlimited), receive a letter grade and the standard graduation unit.

But the approach is not the same. Two major differences are the extent to which students must interrelate their academic work with community experience, and the range of experience offered by the two- or three-week intensive sessions that some students have elected. Teachers have the full-time responsibility of overseeing student activities in the community to make certain they are real, not vicarious or simulated.

For many students, a travel-oriented, intensive course fulfills many of the needed requirements. For example, two- or three-week sessions in Florida, Arizona and Washington, D.C., are offered at least once each semester to a few students. Phillips says these are not typical high school trips. Each one is carefully organized so participants study the history and geography of the area and its socioeconomic and cultural characteristics in advance. Before the trip, students prepare a plan of study including what to look for and how to collect and evaluate data so their independent work can be directed toward fulfilling a specific course contract. The van which takes students to and from the rural and urban campuses at other times provides the transportation for these trips, and costs are kept low through camping and the ingenuity of

the group. A three-week trip to the Florida Keys to study marine biology, for example, cost students about $57 each; one week in Washington, D.C., was $17. Keeping costs low is one of the challenges, says Phillips. Foreign travel for credit is another option.

Students learn, through other courses, that they need not go far away to experience different cultures. One student fulfilled a social studies contract by living with and comparing the values, customs and expectations of three low income Indiana families of diverse backgrounds. For this student, as for many others, the walkabout challenge came from the immersion into a totally new experience and an environment foreign to the middle-class background.

Some intensive courses are held at the rural or urban campuses of the program. Although Learning Unlimited operates as an option within the comprehensive high school, an office building in downtown Indianapolis serves as a base of operations near museums, the public library, art galleries and the state capitol. Regularly scheduled classes and intensive seminars are given here. In addition, a rural campus of 97 acres with a lake, ravines and open fields provides an outdoor learning center 55 miles south of North Central High School. Small groups of students live here for a week at a time, engaging in conservation, farming and rural living at a basic level and sometimes involving themselves with projects in the nearby farming community.

Like a school-within-a-school at North Central, the Learning Unlimited program shares the physical plant, personnel services and even several teachers on a half-time basis. But it has its own space for activity centers and its own teachers, too. Students may select from either regularly scheduled classes or those taught by the alternative faculty – course titles are the same. The majority of the 200 alternative students take some of each, and evaluations have shown that this combination provides more effective preparation for college than either alternative or traditional courses exclusively. In a school where about 80% of the graduates go on to college, this is an important consideration. Phillips describes the alternative students as a cross section of the student population – which tends toward the gifted and talented – with only about one-fifth actually needing academic options. Applicants are screened by a student/faculty committee, and the program currently has room for about half of those who apply.

Acknowledging that some resistance to experiential learning was evident in this highly academic school, Phillips believes that

Learning Unlimited's image has improved and is good, especially within the community. Even though there are now other options available at the school, he recognizes that some faculty members "will never buy in." Nevertheless, both testing, like the SAT and the Wattzer-Glaser Critical Thinking tests, and external evaluations by Indiana universities give evidence of the program's success. In keeping with the concept of challenge, "proof" was extended into an evaluation model for the program as a whole. As Phi Delta Kappa's *Walkabout* describes it:

> Near the end of its first year of operation, the Alternative Program was "brought to trial," a formal, adversary proceeding (educational, not legal). It was modeled after a jury trial, with a "judge" who served as moderator, a "jury" of eight persons serving as evaluators, and both "defense" and "prosecution" teams who introduced "evidence" and called "witnesses" to support their arguments. Students and staff members served on the advocate/adversary teams.
>
> On trial were some of the most central polar issues confronting the program: organization, type of student participants, quality of academic content, two-week travel intensives, rural campus and funding for special projects and student travel.
>
> Testimony was heard, and the jury reached its "verdict" – an informative evaluation of both strengths and weaknesses in the program. The report now serves as a guide for change.

A recent Phi Delta Kappa task force report, *The New Secondary Education*, made these recommendations: that youths be included in the life of the community as a learning experience; that the reality of adult work and responsibility be part of their transition to adulthood; and that the secondary school provide a curriculum based on individual challenge which measures demonstrable competencies and skills. Another task force has been established to help implement these recommendations, with the intention of encouraging school districts to design Walkabout models like Phillips has done at North Central. (For further information: Gary Phillips, Director; Learning Unlimited, North Central High School, 1801 East 86 St., Indianapolis, Ind. 46240; 317: 259-5324. Also, *Walkabout*; Phi Delta Kappa, 8th St. and Union Ave., Box 789, Bloomington, Ind. 47401.)

Chapter 5.

The Way It Is

Despite the dramatic growth of optional learning programs throughout the country, many communities are reluctant to restructure educational priorities and explain the necessary changes to the public. Undoubtedly, a natural tendency exists to resist change and to suspect what departs from the status quo, especially when that status quo is not too uncomfortable. But much greater resistance comes from fears that are grounded in educational concerns – whether real or imagined. As alternative educator Mario Fantini has observed, a major stumbling block to the acceptance of alternatives has been how they have been perceived – at least as much as what they are.

One basic concern involves the uncertainties of experimenting with children's education. Educators may be reluctant to initiate projects that entail new problems – the old problems are familiar and thus less threatening – if "success," however defined, is not assured. Groups struggling to be recognized as part of the American mainstream and too often denied the benefits of the established middle class are particularly reluctant to depart from traditional education. John Newton, director of the experimental schools project funded by the National Institute of Education (NIE) in Berkeley, Calif., told *Education U.S.A.* that a number of difficulties arose in presenting Berkeley's plan for options to the community because of the term "experimental." Black parents especially, Newton said, did not want their children involved in "experiments." They wanted them to have the same kind of "good education" as everyone else, not to be set apart as "different" in an alternative school. Some of these fears might be allayed by better communication and sensitivity to parental backgrounds and goals, he said.

Sometimes there is concern because alternatives have failed. Perhaps they did not measure up to their original promise or were

unable to sustain their initial momentum. Perhaps they turned out to not be the best options for the students they served. But even then, when the program has grown out of a genuine need and both parents and students voluntarily undertake to participate, people are less likely to feel dissatisfied. Furthermore, districts should not be deterred by reports of failure because, as Indiana U. professor Vernon H. Smith points out, "There isn't any failure rate for alternative public schools. Figures that you read are based on nonpublic schools." School districts beginning alternative programs can learn much from both successful and unsuccessful programs that have gone before, whether or not they are still operating. With careful planning, input from all involved parties, and analysis of the track record of options in similar districts, planners can do much to insure the success of their own alternative programs. And if the initial result is not all they desire, the words of Paul Abramson, president of the Mamaroneck, N.Y. school board, to a National School Boards Assn. convention may offer some perspective:

> I believe that programs have the right to fail. If we want teachers to try new ideas, if we want teachers to try to reach each student, if we want alternative education in our elementary schools – then we must be prepared to have some failures and to support, help and sometimes protect those whose programs did not work out.

"It is precisely because of their ability to correct mistakes and to respond rapidly and directly to the needs of their constituencies," a Ford Foundation report states, "that alternatives have gained strength and cohesion."

Another potential problem is that the alternative programs may become identified so closely with particular groups of students that the students are unintentionally labelled and classified. The original purpose may thus be changed by the segregation of small groups. This danger is greatest when the options are established to meet especially visible educational needs – to encourage gifted or talented students; to forestall potential dropouts; to provide reentry programs, for example. Sometimes, under the "alternative" nomenclature, disruptive students are assigned to disciplinary programs, and the stigma attaches to other alternatives that do offer legitimate choices and serve their students' specific needs. Or perhaps elementary-level alternatives are assumed to lead directly to specific secondary alternatives, and the students are "tracked"

just as surely as if the administration had grouped them from the start. Whenever a particular student population – easily identified because of a predominant racial, social, economic or other characteristic – is automatically associated with a particular kind of alternative, the result may be the sort of class isolation which draws objections from groups opposed to the segregation of students on any basis.

Much concern about providing options seems to center on the question of choice. What is the right choice and who gets to make it? What if the parents, student and counselor cannot agree? Might not a wrong choice cut off future options for career or college if a basic class or prerequisite is not taken? Will colleges, for example, accept students who do not have the number of credits in a given subject matter prescribed by the college catalog? Can students be trusted to choose their own schedules and define their own goals wisely?

Alternative school leaders who deal regularly with concerns of this sort (and have had some of them themselves) seem to have arrived at a working rationale regarding the issues of choice. Experience has demonstrated that some of the problems diminish as alternatives become more common. Many of the fears about student choices, however, ignore a basic premise of the alternative philosophy: no one is "sentenced," as Fantini says, to a wrong choice. The right to "opt in" requires the right to "opt out," with no stigma and no sense of failure – merely a recognition that needs and goals may have been misunderstood or may change, and a student can go on to another more appropriate program. Another common assumption is that students of all ages are somehow drifting in and out of programs with no guidance. In the successful programs, counselor referrals, conferences with the student, parents and advisors, personality inventories and performances in the standard school may all enter into what is usually a three-part decision. A National Alternative Schools Program (NASP) survey found, for example, that only about 50% of the programs studied used a lottery or open admissions process, 48% had defined specific criteria for admission of students, and 37% relied on referrals of some sort as part of the selection process.

Districts with alternatives that have been in operation for several years have found that students who have grown up with the idea of choosing their own programs and setting their own goals make more responsible and more effective choices with experience. Much of the negative feedback on student choice dates from the free school movement of the late 1960s, when students

fleeing from highly structured situations floundered as they embraced what seemed to be unlimited options. The "second generation" of alternatives – and particularly alternatives within the public schools – has learned that skills in decision making, like most others, are developed with time and practice. According to Betty Jo Zander, principal of the Pratt Continuous Progress School in Minneapolis, Minn., parents make better overall choices with experience. "They tend very definitely to make different choices for different members of the family. Not all the kids in one family will end up in the same school, particularly after the first year."

As for "what's good for them," very few students elect not to take "basic" courses, according to Wayne Jennings, director of the St. Paul, Minn., Open School. The very fact that students design and fill out their own schedules makes the relevance of reading and math readily apparent even to very young children. In a school without bells, students need to be able to read the clock; multi-age grading offers many opportunities for reinforcement when older students help younger ones; in short, a student's desire to learn grows out of real life situations and a desire to be independent. Besides, says Jennings, even if students elect to wait a while on reading or some other subject, they very often learn more quickly in a short time what others have spent much longer on – simply because they are ready and motivated.

By the same argument, future options are not likely to be cut off because of early curricular choices. Students can usually pick up prerequisites if a change in curriculum requires them, often in a short time when it is in their interest. A move from the alternative district might make it less convenient, but it rarely makes it impossible.

Nor are colleges likely to close their doors to students who have taken an unconventional path to high school completion, as many once feared. Instead, what has happened is that colleges and universities have developed admissions procedures appropriate for those who have graduated from alternative schools. Both national and regional surveys confirm that a majority are willing to admit students without transcripts showing semester credits, grade point averages and rank in class. Furthermore, the list of competencies or project descriptions which many alternatives include as part of a student's transcript frequently offer colleges or prospective employers a more comprehensive view of a student's abilities than does a traditional transcript. Alternative schools often have a higher proportion of their graduates continuing their education

than do others (as in Chicago's Metro High and Philadelphia's Parkway). This may be in part because they tend to attract more highly motivated students. But it indicates certainly that such programs do not inhibit college admissions.

In the long run, every teacher and every program must be measured by what the students have learned. And part of that learning – a big part at the elementary level – must be basic skills. For high school students, meeting state graduation requirements is a necessity in alternative schools as in others. More to the point, perhaps, is whether minimum requirements in terms of Carnegie units are adequate in a society so dissatisfied with the quality of education in conventional settings as to raise the cry of "back to basics." Objective criteria argue against the image of alternatives that teach basic basketweaving, macrame and social adjustment, but little else. Evaluations from many school districts bear out the Ford Foundation findings on alternative schools in its report, *Matters of Choice* – "Where standard measures of achievement like test scores and college admissions are applicable, they show that alternative school students perform at least as well as their counterparts in traditional school programs – and usually better."

As Fantini has observed, "Unless an alternative school can give assurance that the student will be equipped for further learning and will succeed in college, the option is doomed."

Robert Barr of Indiana U. has pointed out that most alternatives, because of their experimental nature, have undergone careful evaluation and are developing specific sets of competencies for their students to achieve. He concludes: "In the area of goal development and goal attainment, alternative public schools may well represent an important accountability model for all public school programs to follow."

It seems, then, that the best alternative schools not only teach the basics, but also are conscientious about defining what the basics are. Among those schools which have translated their educational objectives into competency-based graduation requirements is the St. Paul Open School. Serving youngsters aged 5-18, it has no grade levels or mandatory classes and has never used Carnegie units. To earn their diplomas, students must design and complete projects that demonstrate competence in seven broad areas: consumer awareness; community involvement and current issues; cultural awareness; career knowledge and planning; information finding; interpersonal skills; and communication. These projects, ranging from research reports to accounts of on-site field experiences, become a part of the student's permanent file – a

kind of portfolio of demonstrated abilities to offer a college or an employer as evidence of achievement.

A list of more specific skills has been developed by the Metro Alternative School in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. It describes minimum competencies in 14 categories – covering basic skills, career development, financial management, information assimilation, preparation for citizenship and problem solving. While the list has not been mandated by the school district, it is accepted within the school as a guideline for instructors, who are encouraged to incorporate opportunities for mastering the skills in their classes.

While many alternatives have defined competency-based graduation requirements because the credit system does not reflect their goals and objectives, some states have begun to do so because of widespread public concern about what a diploma really means. The idea of proficiency tests is scarcely new; Denver has had them for 15 years. But state action in response to complaints about the quality of preparation has come only recently.

The Oregon State Board of Education has established graduation requirements based on course credit, attendance and required competencies related to personal development, social responsibility and career development, effective for the class of 1978. In addition, statewide goals for schooling were adopted:

- Each individual will have the opportunity to develop to the best of his or her ability the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to function in each life role.

- In preparation for the role of learner: Each individual will develop the basic skills of reading, writing, computation, spelling, speaking, listening and problem-solving, and will develop a positive attitude toward learning as a lifelong endeavor.

- In preparation for the role of individual: Each learner will develop the skills to achieve fulfillment as a self-directed person; acquire the knowledge to achieve and maintain physical and mental health; and develop the capacity to cope with change through an understanding of the arts, humanities, scientific processes and principles involved in making moral and ethical choices.

- In preparation for the role of producer: Each individual will learn of the variety of occupations; will learn to appreciate

the dignity and value of work and the mutual responsibilities of employes and employers; and will learn to identify personal talents and interests, make appropriate career choices and develop career skills.

- In preparation for the role of citizen: Each individual will learn to act in a responsible manner; will learn of the rights and responsibilities of citizens of the community, state, nation and world; and will learn to understand, respect and interact with all cultures, generations and races.

- In preparation for the role of consumer: Each individual will acquire knowledge and develop skills in the management of personal resources to provide wisely for personal and family needs and meet obligations to self, family and society.

- In preparation for the role of family member: Each individual will learn of the rights and responsibilities of family members and acquire the skills and knowledge to strengthen family life.

Oregon further requires that student transcripts indicate "the degree to which he or she has demonstrated the knowledge and skills necessary to function" in the areas of competency. Diplomas are given to students who have satisfied all requirements, but "a certificate which identifies acquired competencies may be awarded to those students who have met some, but not all, of the requirements for the diploma, and have chosen to end the formal school experience."

In defining attendance requirements, Oregon allows considerable latitude to local school districts in developing policies to encourage alternative schools and programs. Local school boards may, and are encouraged to, adopt policies allowing for individual program completion in more or less than 12 years. And education gained outside the normal schooling experience may be considered in the granting of credit.

A National Assn. of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) Task Force on Graduation Requirements has endorsed the use of competency measures in addition to credits for diploma requirements. Among those to be measured by competencies, it recommends "functional literacy in reading, writing and speaking; the ability to compute, including decimals and percentages; and knowledge of the history and culture of the United States, to

include the concepts and processes of democratic governance."

The task force recommends further that certificates of competency be awarded to every student leaving school – "whether by graduation, by 'stopout' or by 'dropout'" – and that the certificates show a specific level of achievement in reading, writing, mathematics and American civilization.

In addition, the NASSP report comments on the positive benefits of alternative forms of learning which are often experiential or which involve independent study rather than regular classroom activities. But, it warns:

> As the school plans and develops alternative paths to the high school diploma, care must be taken to maintain the integrity of that diploma. The development of adequate skills, together with the documentation of appropriate courses and experiences to include those in a group setting, must be required for a diploma earned by an alternative path as well as for a diploma earned by a more traditional approach. Diplomas should be granted only upon evidence that students have developed these skills and experiences.

Emphasis on Skills

A National Alternative Schools Program (NASP) survey describes the curriculum priorities it found to be typical of public school alternatives:

> First, the major emphasis upon basic skills in alternative schools (indicated in 85% of the schools) tends to dispel the image of alternative schools as being primarily oriented toward effective/humanistic goals. Three-fourths of the schools viewed "human relations" as an important curriculum area – but reading, writing and computation skills were at the top of the list. Also emphasized were interdisciplinary studies (62%), social-political issues (55%), and career or vocational education (49%).

The same NASP survey found that 92% of the schools had written statements of the school's learning goals.

Chapter 6.

Alternatives: How Costly?

It is generally assumed that alternatives cost more than traditional programs because classes tend to be smaller and alternatives often serve special needs and interests. Many districts are deterred by what they see as the add-on expenses of beginning and operating programs that are "not for everybody." Probably fostering this view is the fact that many well-publicized alternatives have been helped along by "soft" money – from sources outside the school district like foundation grants, or categorical funds for innovative or exemplary programs under state or federal legislation. And, in many school districts, when the outside funding ended so did the alternative program.

Those experienced with the planning and implementation of alternatives acknowledge that in some respects they involve higher costs for a school district. But they also point out that some costs are temporary and almost any innovation will require transitional expenditures for curriculum development, inservice training and new facilities. Many of these costs can be covered by reallocating existing resources or by savings in other areas. Once alternative programs are underway, most can operate within a district's normal range of per pupil costs.

Of the respondents to the *Education U.S.A.* survey, 23% said no breakdown of costs for alternatives was available, and 28% said they were proportionately comparable to traditional programs. Another 23% said costs were "slightly higher" or "higher" than for traditional programs; 4% attributed the extras to first year start up costs and 7% to smaller classes. Only 8% cited "considerably higher" costs, while 5% said their alternatives were "less expensive." One district reported its program was "far below the traditional program on a dollar-per-pupil basis." As already noted, virtually all of the respondents felt the additional expense was justified. Many who answered other questions left blank the

one about costs, or replied with a question mark.

Whether or not the school district as a whole breaks down costs for alternative programs, their administrators often find that careful accounting can provide defensive ammunition when critics begin complaining about special programs for special groups and the higher cost of smaller classes. Although a case can be made that expenses are greater for some aspects of alternative schools, so also are the savings for others. One cost benefit is the revenue generated by a higher average daily attendance. Dropout, truancy and disciplinary suspension rates are almost always lower in alternatives than in traditional schools. Programs designed to retain or draw back students who have interrupted their education or which bring private school students back into the public school system help to stem the tide of declining enrollment and the subsequent loss of state and federal funds.

In districts where enrollments are not declining or whose populations are sufficiently in flux to have crowding at some levels, the flexible uses of time and space permitted by alternatives may alleviate overcrowding and the need for new buildings. Programs held after regular hours can spread the use of existing facilities over a longer portion of the day and accommodate more students with no increase in space. Action learning and other community-based programs greatly reduce the need for conventional classrooms, as well as for expensive cafeterias, gymnasiums and athletic fields. Alternative schools which need high cost facilities like gyms and science labs for specific courses often share them with other schools or community recreation centers.

Districts which must acquire new space for alternative programs find that facilities designed for other purposes may be adapted very well in a relatively short time. According to *The Greening of the High School*, a report of a conference sponsored by Educational Facilities Laboratories (EFL) and the Institute for Development of Educational Activities (/I/D/E/A/), such facilities are usually available at 30% to 40% of the cost of new buildings, and sites are often more conveniently located, especially in urban areas. In the report, August Gold of the New York City Board of Education describes other advantages:

> The high school function has changed, and with it the physical plant needs. So we're looking for different kinds of spaces. We need private nooks for dialogue; amiable lounges for interpersonal contact; a large hall for lectures, plays, movies and concerts. We need media centers for the storage of information

and its retrieval and display; vast surfaces for the exhibit of artifacts, creations and contrivances; shops and ateliers and labs for the fabrication of works of art and science. Such spaces, random in shape and of no predetermined size, are found most auspiciously in buildings created for other purposes.

Such economies in acquisition, says Gold, mean that "instead of $500 million for full-sized, traditional buildings, we might spend only $200 million for facilities far more adaptable to the emerging high school function."

In addition to facilities and shared resources, alternatives also have cost-saving potential in staffing and in utilizing community members as resources for instruction and help. These might be businesses which encourage student participation in action learning programs, or guest instructors who visit classes to share their special knowledge. Many alternatives benefit from community interest in extensive volunteer programs: college students to senior citizens offer the extra help some children need under the direction of a regular teacher. Because alternatives allow many ways to use staff, some school districts may get along with fewer professionals at higher salaries – with assistance from aides, volunteers or qualified part-time professionals for whom fringe benefit costs are less. Mamaroneck, N.Y.'s Actionville program saves 30% on fringe benefits this way. Salary funds that would normally go to a second teacher are used by the program coordinator to hire about 25 aides, college students and others who perform specific functions as needed in class.

But savings are not always possible when it comes to staffing. In programs designed to remedy deficiencies and provide counseling for troubled or disruptive students, for example, the need for a smaller teacher/pupil ratio cannot be met entirely by nonprofessional volunteers and aides. Special programs to educate gifted students or to develop talents in the performing arts may also be more expensive to staff. Teachers in Houston's six magnet programs for the gifted and talented have found that staying ahead of students amounts to individualizing for each, and this requires fewer students per teacher. A study of the Upper Atlantic Regional Interstate Project (funded under ESEA, Title V) cites three factors that may decrease costs: utilizing the community as an instructional environment; utilizing qualified community members; and sharing resources. But greater staff requirements, along with start-up expenses and higher costs for transportation, are cited as factors in increased expenses.

Dollars Should Follow Students

"Alternative schools must plan to operate within the **normal range** of the per pupil costs of schools at the same level within the same community. Any school district starting alternatives has to have some kind of flexible arrangement so that the budget for a student follows each student. You can't let 200 kids choose an alternative school and give all the conventional schools the same budget they had before they lost the 200."

Vernon H. Smith, director, Center for Options in Public Education, Indiana University, Bloomington.

Getting There

How students get to the alternatives may be the issue which determines their real availability. In many schools, participation in action learning or community-based programs depends on the student's ability to use public transportation or make personal arrangements. In others, parents are responsible for transporting youngsters if the alternative school is out of their regular attendance area. These solutions – which presuppose the availability of public transportation and/or the economic capability of the family to provide its own – may be viable in some localities, but in others transportation costs are beyond the means of many students and may preclude attendance. In Houston, free transportation to any of the magnet schools is not only "a must" to encourage voluntary transfers, but is mandated by the court as part of the district's integration plan. Though state aid picks up some of the cost, not all situations fall within state guidelines, and the district must pay for these. The Grand Rapids, Mich., schools, with about 20 alternatives and at least one option different from the standard school for each grade level, runs hourly buses to give free access from one school to another and to city resources. Columbus, Ohio, provides regular bus service to students attending alternatives within their attendance zone. Other communities committed to establishing districtwide options will have to reckon with the expenses of additional loading stations, rerouting and other transportation costs as part of their alternatives package.

Chapter 7.

From Planning to Practice

"I couldn't have done it without a very supportive administration and board," said Don Tedesco, who planned and developed the Actionville program in Mamaroneck, N.Y. "They had the courage to let me try something new."

"The impetus to implement the Walkabout concept came from our superintendent," said Gary Phillips of Learning Unlimited. "I was brought in to help develop the program."

"After I was fired by my principal," said a teacher-coordinator, "the superintendent told me, here's your chance to try that new program you've been talking about."

The above comments testify to a basic ingredient of just about every public alternative school with any longevity — continuing support from the policymakers in the school system. And in school districts where a variety of alternatives have flourished, that support has usually been translated at some early stage into a clearly stated board policy that is well known and accepted throughout the community. Although 25% of districts responding to a National School Boards Assn. survey had alternative schools, only 14% had formally approved policy statements. The association recommended:

> School districts which embark on a program to offer each student a choice among alternative educational programs should say so, in a written policy. This statement's adoption should precede the creation of the specific alternatives, so everyone

involved in program development knows from the start the philosophy and goals to which the school board has committed the district.

Such a policy may help to defuse the hostilities inevitably encountered when change seems threatening or ideals come into conflict. Also, many argue that a formal commitment is essential to guard against the fluctuations of politics (boards may change), personalities (superintendents and administrators move on), and finances ("Let's look for a place to cut – that program only has about 125 kids"). It also legitimizes the concept of alternatives in the eyes of the community. Once that has been done, what may have started as a "grass roots" reform in response to a specific need becomes a philosophy which accommodates everything from the fundamental school to the school without walls – and offers choices to everyone. This important shift to a "client-centered" system makes change at all levels seem possible and encourages the imaginative interpretation of rules, regulations and laws so often cited by administrators as reasons for not being able to do something different. To affirm such a policy is not to impose change from the top down on resistant staff members, but to foster a climate in which innovation and creativity can find outlets.

Many alternatives have been the direct outgrowth of parental interest, planning and – often – pressure. But even where support exists for a particular kind of option, it may still be necessary to sell the idea of alternatives to the community at large. One of the first steps, experts say, should be to identify the needs in the district – and that involves taking a look at what is already there. An analysis of which students are not well served by present programs will usually suggest what kinds of changes might be made. Programs which respond to identified needs are not only more likely to accomplish their educational goals; they are also more easily justified to those who must support them financially. And once one option has been implemented successfully, requests – and support – for others often follow.

With so many successful alternative schools now in operation, it would be foolish not to benefit from what has already been learned. Experts agree that it is necessary to find out as much as possible in advance through reading, research, visits to existing programs and talking with people in them. In the process, a district will accumulate the kind of information that will help to set up a sound program. And it will have some of the answers to

questions that will invariably be raised about cost, educational goals, and how the success of similar programs has been measured.

ICOPE's *Changing Schools* newsletter describes the strategies used by the founders of an alternative school in Racine, Wis. The media was used extensively — e.g., radio spots, talk shows, press releases — to interest the public in the program and to gain support from community members (who might later become resource people). And, anticipating the kinds of concerns parents might have, they had answers ready to questions like these: Will my child get into college and/or be able to get a job if he/she goes to this school? Will students learn as much? Is this school for dumb and/or bad students?

To stimulate student awareness and interest, information centers were set up during lunch periods and used the student grapevine via a group of student recruiters. In the early planning stages, an optional credit/noncredit course was organized under the auspices of the U. of Wisconsin-Milwaukee which brought together the various groups involved — students, teachers, parents and school board members could attend.

"Understandings developed in the course helped people decide whether the alternative form of education proposed was of interest to them, and resulted in a process of self-selection as to whether to continue or discontinue involvement in planning the school," the newsletter says. People in the course continued to keep the idea before the community, which was an "absolute necessity" in the minds of the planners.

What's in a Name?

In presenting a program to the public, it is well to bear in mind the value of rhetoric. What's in a name? Quite a bit, apparently, if calling a school "experimental" can turn people off as it did in Berkeley. In a *Phi Delta Kappan* fastback about the fundamental school in Cupertino, Calif., William Pursell says the selection of the name Academics Plus, shorted to A+, has "come back to haunt us."

> We wanted a name which would imply that the academic subject areas would be stressed, but that at the same time there would be room for other subjects such as art, music, physical education, etc. However, the A+ contraction produced the myth that the program was only for students of superior

intellect and outstanding accomplishment. Our problem is one of educating parents to understand that we want to unite – in one classroom – the bright, the average and the below-average learner into a heterogeneous grouping of youngsters. He can learn something from the others, just as they can learn something from him. To us, it is the essence of a democratic system, but our A+ name suggests the opposite to many.

Such seemingly small things create public impressions and foster self-perceptions. Students who have problems already need a school with a neutral name, not with the label "dropout center," to cite another example. Even the singular form, **alternative**, has caused difficulties. It suggests a single option to the existing school program and tends to polarize people on the side of either "the alternative" or the regular school. Use of the singular can also reinforce the idea of selling the option as a panacea. Staff, as well as community, relations may suffer. Within the faculty will certainly be those who are philosophically opposed to whatever option is being established, and others who will feel threatened by it. It's just good politics to avoid value comparisons between one program and another, especially in the early stages.

While some teachers may need to be sold on the idea, others will perceive that the acceptance of the alternatives concept gives them more freedom in their own classes to vary their teaching styles. And experimenters in the system are not the only potential supporters. The teacher who has had open classrooms and team teaching thrust upon him/her may welcome the opportunity to go back to more traditional ways. John Newton, director of the Experimental Schools project in Berkeley, believes that giving teachers a chance to opt in or out of the program, to the extent possible, helps minimize hostilities. And he argues also for raising the awareness of principals. "It's at the building level that it goes or it doesn't," Newton said.

Staffing

Though many alternative school staff members have worked in the district's standard program, they are sometimes viewed by their colleagues as a group apart. Not only may they be physically and philosophically removed, but collectively the staffs in alternative programs tend to be atypical in other ways. The NASP survey and other studies of alternative schools suggest how both the

background of alternative directors and teachers and their work may differ from those of their counterparts in a conventional school. The survey summary states:

> In an effort to increase the diversity of the paid professional staff (administrators, teachers, counselors, aides), public alternative schools have brought in a significant number of staff members without prior public school experience (31.9%) and without state certification (32.5%). However, the majority of these people hold a college degree (only 7.7% of paid professional staff have no degree).

It found also that nonwhites account for over 20% of the paid professional staff, "a figure undoubtedly much greater than the nationwide percentage within public schools as a whole," and that only about 12% of staff members had previous experience in alternative schools.

> While 14% of the schools did not have a director, in those that did fully 20% [of directors] have not had teaching experience. And while about one-third of the directors have been instrumental in beginning other educational projects, almost half of them are without previous administrative experience.

Speculating on the "advantages in terms of freshness and unconditioned responses as opposed to the disadvantages in terms of knowing 'how to deal with the system,' " the NASP summary concludes: "Alternative schools are at the very least opening up new and exciting leadership positions that have not existed in the past and which oftentimes do not attract 'traditional' administrators."

The selection process for professional staff is also likely to be unusual in alternative schools. In 26% of the schools NASP surveyed, students had some part in choosing staff members, and in 62% other professional staff members participated. Final decisions, however, were still likely to be made by the central administration and/or the directors of the school. For the Program for Inquiry, Involvement and Independent Study (3I) in New Rochelle, N.Y., Principal James Gaddy says, "Prospective teachers are interviewed by a committee of students and teachers; applicants are asked to spend additional time with us familiarizing themselves with the program and teaching a class or two. A group of students then recommend a candidate to the principal."

Key Teacher Skills

In a paper on teacher training for alternative schools, Lynne Miller and Tom Wolf of the National Alternative Schools Program define five competencies that data have shown are necessary skills for alternative school teachers. These are:

- The ability to interact with students: Teachers who interact with students in small, nonbureaucratic settings must transcend the usual role definition of teachers and become a model for growth.
- The ability to enter into collaborative teaching, to plan, teach, solve problems and make decisions together. Interdependence and collegiality are top priorities.
- The ability to accept the idea of innovation and change as part of the school: The alternative school teacher must be responsive to the environment in which he/she finds himself or herself; must be able to "diagnose, assess and evaluate the environment – to have practice in moving from the active to the reflective, the creative to analytic modes;" and must learn how to live and work in a continually changing environment.
- The ability to build curriculum: They must know how to build multiple learning environments, use community resources, work with paraprofessionals and volunteers, and insure that what they teach in their individual classes is part of the larger curriculum of the whole school.
- The ability to build and work within institutions: Public alternative school teachers, are, in effect, institution builders. They must be able to mold a school and to make that mold responsive and comprehensive to a variety of constituencies.

Further, says a pamphlet describing the process, "we have learned that just an interview with a candidate is inadequate. A person can sound very convincing when being interviewed but not work effectively later on. A student-teacher committee for teacher selection is important, but having an applicant, when at all possible, spend some time in the program familiarizing himself or herself with it and giving students an opportunity to know the candidate better is probably essential."

The director of an alternative school, one observer told *Education U.S.A.*, "needs to be a humanitarian and a politician, skilled in administration and with lots of charisma. He'll need it." The NASP study shows that directors see both themselves and teachers as much more involved with students, informally and as teachers and counselors, than are conventional school staffs -- and more concerned with social reform and school survival. And both groups are substantially more involved in developing curriculum, planning programs and evaluation.

The definition of roles is a complex matter in alternative schools because of the conflict between the need for an organizational structure and the ideals of participatory democracy on which so many alternatives are based. Schools have fallen or faded because they couldn't satisfactorily resolve this conflict. Terrence E. Deal explores the developmental stages of early alternative schools in his paper, "An Organizational Explanation of the Failure of Alternative Schools," and concludes:

> Those schools that "made it" did so because they were able to find an organizational **middle ground** by maintaining a highly individualized or pluralistic structure, but one that was also well integrated and formalized. A division of labor was made. Roles were clarified. Students were still given considerable autonomy in choosing learning activities, but teachers were formally given the responsibility for expanding the base of alternatives. Goals were specified, evaluation processes were regularized, and rules were established to centralize some decisions while keeping others decentralized and consensual. In short, the successful alternative schools developed a well-knit, sophisticated organization capable of supporting the highly complex instructional program they had chosen to operate.

Role problems may be further complicated in alternative programs housed within standard schools. They are particularly susceptible to being swallowed up by the school in which they are

located. In the Metropolitan School Study Council's newsletter, *Exchange*, David Sachs and Judy Codding analyzed the impact of alternative programs upon administrators and commented on how superintendents viewed them:

> Common to all the superintendents' perceptions of alternative school programs was the fact that "in the view of the high school principal, it's a program within the school. In the view of the people in the program, it's a school within the district. Of course, that's the source of a great deal of friction.

Sachs comments, too, on the composite role of the "teacher-coordinator," who is not quite one thing or the other but something of everything. Teacher-coordinators become involved in the "whole gamut of activities which affect a school," from hiring to curriculum design and long-range planning to evaluation, and they get their share of survival politics and community criticism, too. The role, he says, is "an awkward one at best," because both students and teachers perceive the teacher-coordinator differently than they do other teachers, and he/she is treated differently by both the building principal and the central administration. They conclude:

> Alternative programs seem to have a large administrative impact on the roles of the superintendent, principal and teacher-coordinator, even when all is going well. When there are problems, the impact of alternative school programs can be unbelievable, due to the cohesive nature of the programs and their inherent nature to fight for survival. Despite this, all the administrators seemed genuinely pleased with their alternative programs.

One superintendent gave this advice: "Don't promise what you can't deliver. Make people aware of the limits of your authority and resources at the outset. Understand that you're going to get knocks on the head for it, and be prepared to accept them with relatively good grace."

Student-Teacher Relationships

Among the professional demands unique to alternative schools are the quality and intensity of student-teacher relationships, so

much so they have been suggested as contributing factors to the widely reported phenomenon termed teacher "burnout." In the Columbia Teachers College *Record*, Stephen Wilson of the Center for New Schools, Chicago, reports on a study analyzing student-teacher interactions at an urban public alternative high school. In general, Wilson reports, the absence of behavioral expectations that are imposed through traditional roles resulted in an informal atmosphere in which staff and students felt more at ease to discuss subjects formerly "off limits," like personal problems or the school administration. "We can talk about anything," they said. Though the study found that "the new kinds of relationships had beneficial effects on both teachers and students and seemed to be serving educational purposes," some problems did develop. The teachers' roles of friend, adult, counselor and teacher sometimes conflicted with each other and resulted in new kinds of pressures. Students began to have unrealistic expectations that teachers could help them with the personal adjustments of adolescence. As a result, teachers felt frustrated by their inability to help. Such expanded teacher-student relationships, Wilson reports, pointed up the inadequacies of traditional teacher training in counseling skills and the disparity in backgrounds of students and teachers. Some staff members felt counseling expectations were "overambitious." Roles required that the new teaching strategies be consistent with the informality students expected in class as well as out. A major struggle of alternatives, the study found, "is to find ways for teachers to prod students to live up to standards of work and attendance without giving up the informality and friendship."

In a traditional school, Wilson notes, "formal and functionally specific" relationships offer protection. There are "limits on the timing, spacing and nature of interaction and intensity," which in this alternative school were sources of fatigue and emotional drain. But even though almost the entire original staff had changed in a three-year period, both teachers and students reacted positively to these teacher-student relationships. In summary, Wilson suggests:

> The failure of regular schools to affect basic student orientation and values and their problems with student alienation may derive in part from clinging to the norms of impersonal, formal, instrumental teacher-student relationships. . . .
>
> Many students are not as interested in acquiring some specific set of skills as they are in defining their identities. They do not want mere subject matter experts as teachers. Rather, they want teachers who can understand what concerns them, who can

offer appropriate help, who can make the subjects relate to their interests, who can serve as personal models, and who demonstrate that they are genuinely concerned about the student as a whole person, not only as a student.

Volunteers

A major difference in alternative school staffing is the use of volunteers and other noncertified personnel. The NASP studies found that the use of interns, student-teachers and volunteers was "even more important than anticipated;" fully one-third of the schools said this type of assistance is critical for the survival of the school. Such use offers obvious cost savings in staff salaries and fringe benefits and in the merits of flexibly scheduling learning activities and increased adult/student contact, and follows the recommendations of many commissions and task forces that the school and community be more mutually involved. Many conventional schools recognize such benefits and encourage extensive volunteer participation. But in alternative schools, NASP found, "the bulk of their responsibility is focused upon interactions with students and in curriculum development and extends well beyond the traditional levels of responsibility often accorded 'volunteers' in public schools generally." Perhaps for this reason the use of volunteers may become a touchy subject between the faculties of conventional and alternative schools.

In most school districts, such conflicts rarely go beyond grumblings in the faculty lounge or at local school board meetings. But in Leonia, N.J., the issue has been taken to the state board of education. The case (*Jones* v *Bd. of Education of Leonia School District*) concerns a school district which set up an alternative high school within the public school system. According to Stephen Eisdorfer, attorney for the Education Law Center which is involved in the case, "One of the motivating concepts behind the Leonia Alternative High School (LAHS) was to break down barriers between the school and the community, and members of the community with various types of expertise or special skills – writers, artists, journalists, college professors – were encouraged to volunteer to teach courses. The local teachers' association, apparently fearing the spectre of unpaid volunteers replacing teachers throughout the state, petitioned the commissioner of education to enjoin operation of the school on the grounds that it was utilizing uncertified personnel. A group of students, parents

and other people associated with LAHS, fearing that the school board would not vigorously defend the already controversial program, intervened in behalf of the school." The commissioner ruled for the plaintiffs, but the case is on appeal to the state board of education.

Staff Development

Although teaching in an alternative school apparently requires special skills and talents, relatively few districts have the luxury of a completely experienced staff. Among existing post-secondary teacher training programs, very few include a curriculum focus on alternatives, although more are doing so. Departments of education at Indiana U. and the U. of Massachusetts have pioneered the development of such programs and others are following their lead. At Indiana, for example, the masters level program is open to those with one year of classroom teaching experience and requires a year-long internship or residency, with stipend, in an alternative public school. Interns may work as teachers and administrative aides or assist in research and development projects. According to Robert D. Barr, program director, the fact that 25% of Indiana U.'s graduates now direct alternative schools and that all can find employment in a dwindling job market testifies to the demand for such specialized training.

As a purely practical matter, most of the training for alternatives is either on-the-job or inservice. A number of universities have responded to local needs by assisting with inservice staff development for alternatives as they often have for standard programs. The Teacher Center in Minneapolis was developed as a collaborative effort beween the Minneapolis public schools and the U. of Minnesota to allow teachers from the alternative schools established under the NIE Experimental Schools Project to plan and control the use of staff development funds. The center was to function as a delivery system for teacher training programs, combining the priorities of inservice, preservice and curriculum development when possible. It also was to be a resource facility and an experiment in "organizational governance and differentiated public schools." All people who work with students are involved – community members, parents, aides and professional staff. Needs assessments of programs and staff are important in making activity and training experiences more responsive.

Another model for inservice education is being developed by

the U. of Massachusetts in conjunction with the Worcester Public Schools to prepare teachers in advance for optional learning situations. Called the Teacher Corps, it "provides for a three-year process of involvement which strives to help teachers develop a variety of teaching/learning strategies, develop new norms within the faculty, and develop learning programs which are optional and varied." Some offerings, like independent study contracts and clinical supervision in classes, are for credit; others, like consultants and informal institutes, are not. Work is done on-site. The university staff, all of whom have taught in alternative programs, come to the school. Modular five-week segments allow teachers to enter and exit at different intervals. Needs are assessed twice a year, and the program is constructed to "accommodate emerging concerns." And it is also voluntary.

Many school districts have recognized the need for special alternative staff training and have developed their own programs, often as part of the initial planning process of establishing the school. Others have continuing programs and workshops, as the *Education U.S.A.* survey responses indicate, many of which address the need for improved human relations and counseling strategies. In some areas, schools have combined resources and expertise to form a network whose members design inservice programs and hold workshops at the different schools. Districts have found many routes to teacher training, but more and more are acting on the knowledge that good staff development programs – a plus for any school – are a necessity for alternatives.

These "rules of thumb" from the Teacher Corps model can guide designers of staff development programs:

1. Alternative school staff development should be client-centered. Teachers should have ultimate control of what skills are taught, who teaches them and how they are taught. The "grass roots" quality of alternative schools should be reflected in all aspects of the program.

2. Alternative school staff development programs should be based on expressed needs. The needs of both students and staff should be assessed regularly. Staff needs become the basis for the curriculum of staff development; student needs become the basis for the development of optional programs.

3. Alternative school staff development programs should have two thrusts: accessible training and ready resources. Teacher educators should be accessible to teachers and should be

familiar with the sites in which teachers work. Libraries, resource rooms and catalogues of materials should be an integral part of the program.

4. Alternative school staff development programs should provide support and a framework for commitment. Working in an alternative school is a demanding task; teacher "burnout" is high. The programs should recognize this reality and provide environments for individual growth and group development as well as fostering a healthy and energizing commitment to the development of responsive learning environments for children.

Keeping It Going

Besides its other merits, staff development may be a hedge against the school or program folding when the director leaves. Assuming that the alternative program serves a genuine need, that a workable organizational structure has been established, and that the school has adequate financial support, the loss of key personnel can be another reason for the collapse of alternatives. This is a particular danger in small schools or in programs staffed by the few enthusiastic personnel who initiated them. Another reason is that many "alternatives" are not very different from standard programs. Perhaps they never were – the name was merely applied to capitalize on a trend. Or, just as likely, what began as "different" was gradually modified until it became indistinguishable from traditional programs.

These dangers suggest that continuation of an alternative requires support at various levels, including a school board policy that is supported by a satisfied constituency of parents, students and the community. Clearly the best survival strategy is a genuinely distinct program, distinguished by its excellence as well as by its difference.

There is the possibility, however, that some alternatives may be self-limiting. "One of the wonderful things about alternative schools," says Gene Mulcahy, former director of the Shanti School in Hartford, Conn., "is that they can be gotten rid of when they cease to be functional." When a big recruiting drive is needed to attract students, when the school is upset by internal dissension, or when the established goals are no longer being met, it's time to start anew.

As needs change, experts agree, so must the program. The

healthy alternative, many advocates believe, is the one constantly renewing itself, evolving in response to the perceived needs of its constituencies, both in goals and methodology. The ongoing evaluation process in which most alternatives engage provides continuous feedback and can build in a capacity for change.

Even those who believe program evaluation is a necessity admit it poses particular problems for alternative schools. It is necessary to gain information about weaknesses that need correction, as well as strengths, to justify the existence of an alternative program. The problems stem in large part from finding accurate ways to evaluate what is wanted and the time that intensive self-study and external evaluations require. Instruments, such as standardized tests, devised to evaluate standard programs with different goals may be inappropriate for the alternative. But even if they are not compatible with the alternative's objectives, they will probably have to be given if they are part of the district's evaluation measures, along with whatever other devices the district customarily employs. One of the ground rules is to propose alternatives to the regular means of evaluation **before** the school opens. Another is to insure that the school be evaluated on what has been agreed on as its goals, rather than solely by criteria designed for a totally different kind of school or program. Indicators like teacher, parent and student surveys and figures on attendance and dropouts address the matter of client satisfaction.

Once the results are in, their most common use is to help improve the program and to account to the local school board. Some educators suggest that a low profile is desirable – that schools should not make a big media issue over their successes, since comparisons may foster hostilities at the same time. Others say that already controversial alternatives need all the help they can get. If that means publicizing test scores and college acceptance rates, so be it.

Competent, effective and systematic evaluation is not only essential to the self-improvement of a given program, but may also be useful in assessing the strengths of alternatives in responding to particular educational needs. They stand to gain from the development of methods of evaluation that will confirm their effectiveness. In some school districts, what began as an evaluation of the alternative schools has expanded to include others. The Grand Rapids (Mich.) District Office of Planning and Evaluation, established to evaluate the many alternatives there, has also undertaken the evaluation of conventional schools to identify areas of need that might lead to developing new alternatives.

Chapter 8.

Conclusion

At present, according to estimates made by Indiana U. professor Vernon H. Smith, alternatives probably serve about one million children in the United States – roughly 2% of the total elementary and secondary enrollment. Only a small proportion of families have a choice of schools in their communities; even fewer have more than one option to the standard program. Most have no choice at all. Although some districts have open enrollment policies that, in effect, make every school an alternative, the number of districts working to provide options for every child is still small.

If the movement for educational alternatives is to continue to grow and become a force for substantial educational change, as its advocates hope, certain developments would seem to be necessary. There must be philosophical support for the alternatives concept among educational policymakers and those groups which influence them. The variety of task force and conference reports endorsing alternative learning experiences and new paths to the high school diploma, like experiential and community-based education, suggest that the philosophical base is enlarging.

In addition, state boards, departments of education and state legislatures may need to adopt policies which do not restrict the development of alternatives and to interpret those that already exist in ways that permit local initiative. California led the way when it passed legislation mandating alternatives in 1975. It included these provisions:

- Parents may request boards to establish alternative schools or programs.
- Teachers and students are to be "entirely selected from volunteers."

- "Previous classroom performance" shall not limit students' opportunities.

- Any alternative school shall be "maintained and funded at the same level of support as other educational programs for children of the same age level operated by the district."

- Racial, sex or ethnic discrimination is barred.

- There must be an annual evaluation, including pre- and post-testing of basic skills, identifying variables affecting academic achievement and including teacher, parent and student input.

A few other states have actively encouraged the development of optional programs in a statement of goals or by issuing guidelines and offering aid for research and development.

Alternatives in Education, an issue paper published in 1975 by the Upper Atlantic Regional Interstate Project, lists a number of ways that states can initiate and encourage the development of alternatives, or facilitate and support local efforts.

To encourage development, states can:

√ Develop guidelines for defining an experimental school and authorize waivers of existing statutory and administrative requirements when that can be justified.

√ Expand the state aid program for pupil transportation.

√ Build incentives into the state aid program.

√ Prepare teachers for alternative programs by, for example, requiring colleges to place a fixed proportion of student teachers in alternative programs for their practical experience to stimulate interest and prepare for a variety of options.

√ Provide a mechanism for parents to help educate their children.

√ Facilitate the development of alternative schools outside the main school building.

√ Provide seed money – designating it for start up, not operation. (This was felt to be especially important in times of economic constraint.)

√ Experiment with vouchers.

To support local efforts, states can:

√ Create an office of innovative and alternative education, establishing recognition for and promoting interaction among experimental programs.

√ Hold workshop and training sessions for administrators and teachers to foster consciousness raising and skills development.

√ Develop a detailed analysis of alternative schools and programs and disseminate information to schools considering them.

√ Assist in obtaining outside funds (state, federal or private) and in proposal writing.

√ Promote community interest in alternatives via established public information channels.

√ Publish and distribute a newsletter to students about options.

√ Provide technical assistance in evaluation.

Among those steps that would discourage or thwart the development of alternative schools and programs are (1) prescribing a statewide curriculum; (2) limiting the practice of awarding academic credit for nonacademic work; and (3) establishing a statewide testing program with incentive aid tied to test scores.

Most states, the issues paper says, neither encourage nor thwart alternatives. They are ambivalent. If this attitude continues, "the fate of the alternatives movement rests with the public; it will depend on whether the disenchantment with the traditional brand of education burgeons or subsides, and whether the public considers alternatives in education to be a viable solution to the problem and supports them," the paper says. Both the attitude toward education and the political and economic climate will influence public support.

Follow the Experts

With the development of successful alternative schools have come suggestions and guidelines from the experienced for those who wish to establish similar programs. But is there any relationship between following the experts' guidelines and the success of the school? A study described in an issue of ICOPE's *Changing Schools* says there is. It was found that the most successful schools used "decidedly more" of the guidelines thought by principals of alternative schools to be "very important" than did the least successful schools. These guidelines were:

- √ Develop a proposal which includes a rationale or philosophy.
- √ Develop a proposal which includes objectives.
- √ Allow time for planning and implementation.
- √ Secure a commitment from the school board.
- √ Develop a proposal which includes evaluative processes.
- √ Set up staffing by choice.
- √ Provide for a guidance and counseling approach consistent with the philosophy of the alternative school.
- √ Develop a proposal which includes a curriculum.
- √ Develop a financial and operational format.
- √ Set up a special training program for alternative school faculty.
- √ Set up the decision-making of the functioning alternative school to include, as a shared responsibility, parents, students, community and school faculty.

Four other factors, the study showed, also had a decided effect on the success of alternative schools. These were (a) the presence of a tradition of innovation within the district; (b) the degree of an alternative school's autonomy within its district; (c) the degree to which an alternative school follows well thought out hiring policies and procedures; and (d) the presence of an inspirational, hard-working person with definite leadership capacity to guide the alternative school planning stage.

(For further information, contact Frank H. Surpless, curriculum coordinator, Glenbrook South High School, 4000 West Lake Ave., Glenview, Ill. 60025.)

"Because of their potential impact," the paper concludes, "state education agencies should examine how the growth of educational options best complements and contributes to the existing system of public education, and should adopt a position in accordance with these objectives. Consideration should be given now for the movement is presently in a developmental stage where its direction can be strongly influenced by state policy."

In the long run, many advocates of alternative schools and programs believe that local efforts and interest will determine their future growth. The view of Leonard B. Finkelstein, former director of the alternative Parkway and District Six superintendent in Philadelphia, is shared by many. Describing himself as both a dreamer and a realist, Finkelstein said he was optimistic about the potential for alternatives. They have been thoroughly and carefully evaluated and have proven themselves, he said. "I'm not worried about their ability to produce, but their continued existence depends on the perspicacity of boards and superintendents."

A measure, perhaps, of how far alternatives have come toward institutional respectability is the adoption of criteria for their accreditation by the North Central Assn. of Colleges and Schools. The introduction to "Policies and Standards for the Approval of Optional Schools and Special Function Schools," summarizes both the rationale and the potential for alternatives:

> In recent years, the concept of educational choice (optional schools, alternative schools – call them what you will) has penetrated deeply into the American system of education. It seems likely that in the foreseeable future many different types of schools will exist side by side within the total educational structure, each designed to meet a different set of specified learning and living needs of young people. These schools will not be competitive with nor antagonistic to one another, but rather will be complementary in effort and thrust, helping American education redeem its long-term commitment to the fullest education for every child.
>
> While the standard school certainly will continue to be the major institution in American education, it will not be the exclusive one. Other types of schools will develop, seeking to provide more fully for the total educational needs of the community. Widespread educational options – the coexistence of many types of alternative schools and programs – should strengthen American education as a whole.

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